

Organisation Name		Reference code (for office use only)
Link to Change		2026-05-YWG15
Organisation Address		
40 Mill Street Bedford Bedfordshire MK40 3HD		
Website Address		
https://www.linktochange.org.uk		
How did you hear about the Triangle Trust		
via CVS		
Please describe your organisation's purpose in one to two sentences		
Link to Change is a specialist, expert organisation supporting children and young people who are being exploited, particularly through county lines and gang-related harm. We deliver gender- and trauma-informed interventions, centre lived experience, and work alongside young people to help them move away from exploitation and rebuild their lives.		
Type of Organisation? (tick all that apply and complete relevant details)		
Charity	Registered Charity Number	Date Registered
Yes	4749130	2003
Community Interest Company	Registered Companies House Number	Date Registered
No		
Social Enterprise	Has your organisation been awarded the Social Enterprise Mark?	Year Awarded
No		
Grant Summary		
A specialist programme for GYW aged 11-18 involved in or at risk of county lines and gang-related exploitation. Through intensive, trauma-informed support, we will reduce their risk of offending and support them to safely move away from exploitation.		
Please describe your principal beneficiaries.		
We are an expert specialist organisation in child exploitation, with extensive, frontline experience supporting girls and young women (GYW) affected by county lines and gang-related harm. This is a core part of our work, and we are working daily with GYW experiencing these risks. Across our services, we support young people aged 7-24. Over 75% of our current beneficiaries are GYW, giving us strong experience and insight in working with this cohort. Many of the GYW we support are already involved in, or at high risk of entering, the criminal justice system because of exploitation. They are being coerced into illegal activities and known to police and safeguarding services. In addition to this, over 85% are care-experienced, outside of education or at risk of exclusion, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and offending. For this project, we will focus specifically on girls aged 11-18 at highest risk.		
Please describe the specific local needs of the young women and girls you work with that this project will address		
<i>(Maximum 4000 characters)</i>		

Girls and young women (GYW) in Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes are at significant risk of criminal exploitation linked to county lines, gangs and organised crime, creating clear pathways into offending and contact with the criminal justice system.

- Bedfordshire Police and National Crime Agency data identify the county as 5th nationally for criminal exploitation, with over 30 organised crime groups and more than 20 active county lines operating locally. These networks rely on the exploitation of GYW, to transport drugs, money and weapons.

- In Milton Keynes, the Vital Signs 2025 report highlights rising levels of serious youth violence and gang-associated activity. Local data shows that 57% of young people involved in serious youth violence have also been reported missing, evidencing the direct link between exploitation, coercion and offending pathways.

This is important because GYW are often drawn into offending through coercion, emotional manipulation and relationships, meaning criminal behaviour is frequently a direct result of exploitation. Without intervention, this leads to criminalisation, repeat offending and long-term harm.

GYW affected by this exploitation face multiple and overlapping vulnerabilities:

- 1 in 3 children in Milton Keynes live in poverty and 26% are persistently absent from education, increasing exposure to exploitation (MK Vital Signs).
- Those who are care-experienced or excluded from education are more likely to be targeted by exploiters and drawn into criminal activity (DfE; Children's Commissioner).

Despite this, there is a clear gap in gender-specific provision. Existing responses are largely based on male offending patterns and fail to recognise the relational and hidden nature of harm experienced by girls. As a result, GYW are often criminalised rather than safeguarded.

Demand for specialist support locally is high and increasing:

- Referrals into our services have increased by 233% since 2020 (19 per month), with waiting lists closed due to demand.
- Over 75% of those we support are GYW, many already involved in, or at risk of entering, the criminal justice system.

The level of need is acute:

- Over 70% are already being coerced into criminal activity, including transporting drugs or money.
- Over 85% are care-experienced, outside education or at risk of exclusion, increasing exposure to offending pathways.
- GYW from racialised communities and those who are neurodiverse are disproportionately affected and under-supported, reflected in our cohorts where over 60% have SEND and up to 50% are from minoritised backgrounds.

Link to Change is uniquely placed to respond to this need. We have over 15 years' experience delivering specialist exploitation services, with over 75% of our beneficiaries being GYW, and a strong track record of supporting those already known to police and youth justice to reduce offending and exit exploitation.

Challenge: Breaking the Line has been specifically designed to address this gap. The project will provide targeted, gender- and trauma-informed activities for GYW aged 11-18 who are already involved in, or at high risk of entering, the criminal justice system due to county lines and gang-related exploitation. Through intensive 1:1 intervention, targeted group work and peer support, the project will disrupt offending behaviours, reduce exploitation risk and support sustained exit from criminal networks.

This need is urgent. Without intervention, GYW will continue to be exploited into criminal activity, increasing the likelihood of arrest, reoffending and long-term system involvement.

This funding is essential to expand this targeted approach, enabling us to reach GYW earlier, increase capacity and deliver consistent, specialist intervention for those at greatest risk. It will ensure that GYW currently unable to access support receive timely intervention to prevent offending, reduce harm and achieve sustained change.

What are the key outcomes you will be seeking to achieve for young women and girls either at risk of offending or who are already caught up in the criminal justice system?

(Maximum 3000 characters)

Challenge: Breaking the Line will deliver clear, measurable outcomes for GYW who are already involved in, or at high risk of entering, the criminal justice system due to county lines and gang-related exploitation. Our support is trauma-informed, gender-specific support and shaped by lived experience.

We will provide 1:1 support to 20 GYW per year, alongside targeted group work with 40 GYW aged 11-18 years in Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes. Based upon our current cohorts, over 60% will have diagnosed/undiagnosed special education needs and 50% will be from minoritised backgrounds.

1. Reduction in offending and criminal justice involvement

- 70% of the 1:1 cohort (14 GYW) will demonstrate a reduction in behaviours linked to offending, disengagement from roles within county lines and gang-related activity such as transporting drugs/money.
- 65% of those known to police/youth justice services will show reduced police contact or no further offending during support.
- Those not yet in the system will demonstrate no entry into the criminal justice system during engagement.

2. Sustained exit from exploitation and criminal networks

- Based on our established outcomes, 80% (16 GYW) will achieve clear and sustained movement away from county lines and gang-related exploitation, including reduced or ceased involvement in criminal activity.
- Including disengagement from exploiters, withdrawal from criminal roles and increased stability in safer environments, positive peer relationships and peer support opportunities that reduce reliance on exploitative networks and reinforce safer choices.

3. Increased awareness and early disengagement through group work

- 40 GYW engaged in group work will show increased awareness of county lines and gang-related exploitation.
- 90% (36 GYW) will demonstrate early steps to reduce vulnerability and avoid involvement in criminal activity.

4. Increased safety and reduced exposure to harm

- 80% of the 1:1 cohort will show reduced indicators of harm, fewer missing episodes, reduced contact with exploiters, improved safeguarding status.
- All participants will report increased access to trusted support, improved safety, reduced exposure to exploitative environments.

5. Improved engagement in education, training or positive pathways

- 65% of the 1:1 cohort will demonstrate improved engagement in education, training or structured activity, supporting a move away from exploitation and offending.
- 75% of group participants will show increased engagement with education, alternative provision or positive pathways.

6. Increased resilience and ability to resist exploitation

- 70% of the 1:1 cohort will demonstrate improved resilience, decision-making and ability to resist coercion, supported through positive peer support, reducing isolation and vulnerability to re-exploitation and supporting sustained change.

How will you track the impact you are making?

(Maximum 3000 characters)

We will track impact through a robust monitoring framework, combining quantitative data, validated tools and qualitative evidence to demonstrate progress for GYW affected by county lines and gang-related exploitation.

1. Baseline and ongoing assessment

Each GYW will complete a baseline assessment at referral, capturing exploitation, offending behaviour, risk and wellbeing. This will be reviewed regularly and at exit to evidence change against outcomes including reduced offending and disengagement from exploitation.

All 1:1 GYW will have a personalised support plan, with goals linked to reducing criminal activity, increasing safety and exiting exploitation.

2. Measuring reduction in exploitation and offending

We will use our Link to Change Outcome Web to track:

- involvement in county lines and gang-related activity
- contact with exploiters
- missing episodes and exposure to harm

Regular reviews will evidence reduced exploitation, decreased offending behaviours and disengagement from criminal activity, directly measuring key outcomes.

3. Outcome measurement tools

The Link to Change Outcome Web will track progress across exploitation, safety, relationships and independence, providing a visual and measurable record of change over time.

Wellbeing and resilience will be measured using PHQ-9, GAD-7 and trauma-informed assessments, evidencing improved decision-making and reduced vulnerability to exploitation.

4. Engagement and behavioural change

We will track:

- engagement in education, training or employment
- attendance and participation
- engagement with safeguarding and multi-agency services

These indicators evidence movement away from exploitation and offending towards positive pathways.

5. Groupwork evaluation

For group work, pre- and post-session evaluations will measure increased understanding of county lines and gang-related exploitation. These will evidence the awareness outcomes and early behavioural changes, demonstrating reduced vulnerability to criminal involvement.

6. Case management and data analysis

All support, risk levels and progress will be recorded in our case management system, enabling real-time tracking and analysis. This allows us to monitor individual progress and overall trends, including reductions in offending and exploitation across the cohort.

7. Qualitative evidence and partner feedback

We will collect feedback from GYW, case studies and reflective reviews, alongside input from police, youth justice and partner agencies. This provides evidence of reduced offending, improved safety and disengagement from exploitation, while capturing lived experience.

8. Continuous review and learning

Data will be reviewed throughout delivery to track progress and adapt support. Our approach recognises both small and sustained change, ensuring we evidence impact at all stages of disengagement from exploitation.

What are the key activities you will undertake with this funding to achieve these outcomes?

(Maximum 3000 characters)

The project will deliver a specialist programme for GYW involved in or at risk of entering the criminal justice system due to county lines and gang exploitation. It is trauma-informed, gender-specific and responsive, ensuring activities reflect their experiences and reduce offending and related risks.

GYW will be identified through established pathways, such as police and youth justice. Referrals will prioritise GYW aged 11-18 known to police/youth justice or with a history of offending, county lines or gangs, those who are care-experienced, excluded or at risk of exclusion, neurodiverse or from Black or minoritised communities. We will target those at highest risk of first offences, reoffending and criminalisation.

Core Activity: Intensive 1:1 weekly support(open-ended/flexible). GYW will:

- complete a comprehensive assessment covering exploitation, offending and risk. A co-produced plan will set goals relevant to the GYW.
- provide open-ended, intensive 1:1 support for 20 GYW per year, delivered by a specialist female practitioner with relevant lived experience.

Support is flexible, delivered in locations that meet need: community settings, schools or family homes; increasing during risk periods.

- building trusted relationships
- disrupting involvement in county lines and gangs
- addressing offending behaviours
- safety planning and crisis intervention
- advocacy with statutory services

These activities directly lead to reduced offending, disengagement from county lines/gangs and increased safety. Support continues until there is clear evidence and professional judgement that the young person is safe.

Activity: Targeted early intervention group work delivering structured programmes for 40 GYW per year focusing on:

- county lines and gang exploitation
- coercion, control and grooming
- offending behaviours and consequences
- confidence and decision-making

Group work provides early intervention to prevent first offences and will be delivered in schools and community settings where needed. These activities will result in increased awareness; early behaviour change and reduced vulnerability. Where higher risk is identified, GYW will be stepped into 1:1 support.

Activity: Peer support and participation

Peer support is a key activity as is a youth-led participation group, engaging in peer discussions, shared learning and mutual support. This provides positive role modelling, reduces isolation and strengthens engagement. GYW will contribute to the co-design of

activities and resources, ensuring delivery remains relevant and grounded in lived experience.

Activity: Multi-agency working and advocacy

Working with police, youth justice, social care and education, contributing to multi-agency processes and advocating for GYW to be recognised as victims, supporting reduced criminalisation and improved outcomes.

As GYW disengage from exploitation, activities will focus on education, training and positive pathways, supporting sustained change and reducing reoffending.

How many girls will you be working over the course of the grant?

120

Does your proposed project already exist or is this a new piece of work?

If this project is already operating, please describe how you will build on what you have achieved to date.

If this is a new piece of work, please explain what this funding will enable you to do differently.

(Maximum 3000 characters)

This project builds on Link to Change's existing exploitation services but creates a clearly defined strand focused on GYW involved in, or at risk of entering, the criminal justice system due to county lines and gang-related exploitation.

This funding will enable us to build on what is already working by creating the capacity, focus and consistency required to intervene earlier and with greater intent. It allows us to shift from responding to presenting risk, to identifying and addressing the drivers of offending linked to exploitation at an earlier stage.

Over the past 15 years, we have built a strong track record of supporting children and young people affected by exploitation, with over 75% of those we work with being GYW. Through this work, we are increasingly identifying a cohort of GYW already involved in offending or at risk of entering the criminal justice system, often as a direct result of criminal exploitation.

Currently, these GYW are supported within our wider services, where we respond to high levels of risk, complexity and safeguarding need. As demand has grown significantly, including a 233% rise in referrals, this has highlighted the need for a more targeted, structured approach that focuses specifically on preventing offending and reoffending alongside exploitation.

It will enable us to place greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention, working with GYW before involvement in offending becomes entrenched, while maintaining consistent, trusted relationships that support long-term behaviour change. This is particularly important for GYW who may not be identified through traditional offending pathways but are already being exploited into criminal activity.

The funding will also strengthen our ability to deliver a clear and responsive pathway, where GYW engaged through group work can be stepped into intensive 1:1 support if further risk is identified. While this is something we already do, funding allows us to do so more consistently and without delay, ensuring support is provided at critical points of risk. Importantly, it enables us to focus directly on the link between county lines, gangs, exploitation and offending, ensuring our work is intentionally designed to reduce first offences and reoffending, rather than addressing exploitation risk in isolation. This creates a more joined-up and effective response for GYW whose offending is driven by coercion, control and criminal networks.

Overall, this project represents a strengthening and refinement of our existing model, enabling earlier identification, more consistent engagement and a clearer focus on criminal justice outcomes. This will significantly improve our ability to prevent escalation into offending, reduce reoffending and support sustained exit from county lines and gang-related exploitation for GYW most at risk of criminalisation.

What expertise and track record do you have to be able to deliver this work successfully? Please specifically mention your expertise linked to gender and trauma informed approaches.

(Maximum 3000 characters)

Link to Change has specialist expertise and a strong, evidenced track record in delivering gender-specific, trauma-informed interventions that reduce exploitation and offending among GYW.

Our expertise is demonstrated through sustained delivery with a high-risk cohort. GYW make up over 75% of those we support, many already known to police, youth justice and safeguarding services. We consistently work with GYW experiencing multiple forms of trauma and active involvement in exploitation-linked criminality, giving us in-depth, applied expertise in the relationship between trauma, exploitation and offending behaviour. Our gender-informed practice is highly developed and central to our outcomes. We specialise in working with GYW whose offending is driven by coercion, relationships and control, rather than more visible pathways. This expertise enables us to identify and respond to hidden harm, engage those who are under-identified within systems, and intervene effectively where others have been unable to sustain engagement. Our trauma-informed approach is operational and outcome-driven. We use consistent, relationship-based interventions that recognise trauma responses, reduce re-traumatisation and build emotional regulation. This is not theoretical - it is the foundation of how we achieve sustained engagement and behaviour change with a cohort that traditionally experiences high levels of disengagement.

Our track record provides clear evidence of impact. Across our services we consistently achieve:

- 96% engagement rates, including with GYW previously disengaged from support.
 - over 80% sustained movement away from exploitation.
 - over 70% diversion from the criminal justice system and reductions in offending-related behaviours.
 - over 90% of group GYW achieving increased awareness and early behavioural change.
- These outcomes evidence our ability not only to engage GYW, but to reduce risk, disrupt offending pathways and support sustained change.

Our expertise is further strengthened by our delivery model. As a fully female organisation, we can build trust with GYW who have experienced county-lines and gangs, which directly contributes to our high engagement and retention rates.

Our team capability underpins this track record. Practitioners are appropriately qualified, including backgrounds in criminology and offending pathways, and work alongside colleagues with lived experience of trauma and exploitation. This is led by a CEO with both professional and lived experience, including work with those involved in inner-city gangs, ensuring leadership that is informed by both evidence and real-world insight. This combination of specialist practice, proven outcomes and skilled, experienced staff demonstrates our ability to deliver effective interventions for GYW affected by county lines and gangs. It shows not only that we understand this cohort, but that we consistently achieve measurable and sustained outcomes in reducing risk and criminal justice involvement.

Does your organisation have existing knowledge and expertise working across the criminal justice system?

(Maximum 3000 characters)

Link to Change has strong, well established experience working across criminal justice, safeguarding and exploitation systems, developed over 15 years of supporting GYW affected by exploitation, including those already involved in or at risk of offending. We have significant experience supporting GYW involved in or at risk of offending where exploitation linked to county lines and gangs is a key factor, giving us a strong understanding of the links between exploitation, criminalisation and justice system involvement in practice. We have well established relationships with police, youth justice services, social care and education. We are embedded within local multi agency structures across Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes and regularly contribute to risk assessment, safeguarding planning and information sharing. Our work aligns with wider strategies to reduce exploitation, harm and offending.

We work directly with GYW known to police and youth justice services, including those involved in or at risk of offending linked to county lines and gang activity. We work alongside statutory partners to reduce offending behaviours, support diversion and inform decision making, particularly where behaviour is driven by coercion and control. Our charity plays an active leadership role within local systems. We chair the SPOC (Single Point of Contact) meeting with the local authority and sit on Contextual Safeguarding, MACE (Multi Agency Child Exploitation) and other panels where cases involving criminal exploitation are discussed. We sit on the Youth Futures Panel alongside youth offending teams, contributing to coordinated responses for those at risk of entering or re entering the criminal justice system.

This involvement gives us direct insight into offending pathways, emerging risks and local patterns of exploitation linked to county lines and gangs. It enables us to influence responses that are safeguarding led, trauma informed and appropriate to the experiences of GYW.

Our staffing team bring additional criminal justice expertise, including an Operations Manager with a professional criminal justice background and practitioners with criminology knowledge, strengthening our ability to assess risk, engage effectively with statutory services and deliver credible interventions.

A key part of our work is ensuring GYW are recognised as victims of exploitation rather than solely offenders, particularly where behaviour is driven by coercion and control within criminal networks. We understand the complex pathways into offending for GYW, including trauma, exclusion, relationships, care experience and hidden harm, and the ways GYW are often under identified within exploitation linked to gangs.

This combination of direct work with justice involved GYW, system leadership, multi agency collaboration and specialist expertise ensures we are well placed to deliver effective interventions for those at risk of entering, or already involved in, the criminal justice system.

Please explain how the grant will be spent and include a topline budget with brief explanations

(Maximum 3000 characters)

The grant of £90,000 over two years (£45,000 per year) will fund a dedicated practitioner and associated delivery costs, with most resources directed to frontline support for GYW.

Annual Budget Breakdown:

- Specialist Practitioner (salary, NI & pension): £35,758

Funds a full-time dedicated practitioner to deliver 1:1 support and group work. This is the core of the project and ensures consistent, relationship-based intervention for GYW at risk of offending.

- Project Management & Oversight: £3,500

Contribution to operational management, safeguarding oversight and performance monitoring to ensure safe, effective delivery and achievement of outcomes.

- Travel & Resources: £3,600

Enables flexible delivery in community settings, schools and homes, and supports materials for 1:1 sessions and group work.

- IT & Mobile: £696

Supports mobile working, communication and access to case management systems, enabling consistent engagement with GYW.

- Contribution to Clinical Supervision: £260

Provides specialist supervision to support staff wellbeing, safe practice and effective management of complex trauma and risk.

- Overheads: £1,186

Contribution to organisational infrastructure, including safeguarding systems, insurances and organisational support required for delivery.

Summary

This budget prioritises frontline delivery, with over 75% of funding allocated to the specialist practitioner role. The remaining costs ensure the project is safely managed, accessible and effective, enabling high-quality, trauma-informed support and strong outcomes in reducing involvement with county lines, gangs and offending.

Who will be responsible for overseeing and delivering this work?

(Maximum 3000 characters)

The project will be overseen by Link to Change's CEO, who holds overall responsibility for strategic direction, quality assurance and safeguarding. The CEO brings extensive professional and lived experience in exploitation, trauma and working with young people involved in criminality, ensuring the project remains focused, effective and aligned to the needs of GYW.

Day-to-day operational oversight will be provided by the Operations Manager, who has a background in the criminal justice system and is responsible for managing delivery, supervising staff, reporting and ensuring strong performance against outcomes, including oversight of risk and safeguarding.

A dedicated specialist practitioner will be responsible for delivering this project, providing both intensive 1:1 support and group work with GYW involved in or at risk of offending linked to county lines and gang-related exploitation. This dedicated role ensures consistency, continuity of relationships and a clear focus on achieving outcomes. Referrals will be managed by an Advanced Practitioner, who will assess risk and need, allocate cases appropriately and provide ongoing mentoring and guidance to the project practitioner. This ensures high-quality delivery, consistent decision-making and effective risk management from the point of referral onwards.

The practitioner is supported by a wider team with diverse professional expertise, including backgrounds in education, psychology, health and social care, as well as a trained counsellor within the team. This provides a strong foundation of knowledge across

behaviour, trauma, safeguarding and emotional support, strengthening the quality of interventions and ensuring GYW receive well-rounded, informed support.

The practitioner will receive regular clinical supervision, management supervision and take part in group case discussions and reviews, ensuring ongoing reflective practice, safeguarding oversight and continuous development. This structure enables effective monitoring of risk, progress and outcomes, and supports timely adaptation of interventions. The team works closely with police, youth justice services, social care and safeguarding partners, contributing to multi-agency meetings and risk management processes. This ensures delivery is coordinated, informed by current intelligence and aligned with wider strategies to reduce offending and exploitation.

As a fully female organisation, all delivery is carried out by women, which is critical in building trust and engagement with GYW who have experienced gender-based harm and exploitation.

This structure of strong leadership, dedicated delivery resource, skilled oversight and robust supervision ensures the project is well-managed, responsive to risk and able to deliver consistent, high-quality support to GYW at risk of entering, or already involved in, the criminal justice system.

How do you plan to continue this work once the grant ends?

(Maximum 3000 characters)

We are committed to sustaining and growing this work beyond the life of the grant, building on our strong track record of securing funding and delivering specialist support for GYW affected by county lines, gangs and offending.

This project has been intentionally designed as a targeted strand within our wider service model, enabling it to be embedded within ongoing delivery rather than operating as a standalone project. Integrating this approach into our core provision will ensure that the learning, pathways and impact achieved are retained and built upon, strengthening and extending our long-term offer for GYW affected by criminal exploitation.

Link to Change has a proven history of securing and sustaining funding from a range of sources, including trusts, foundations and statutory partners. We will build on this by using the strong outcomes and evidence generated through the project, including reductions in offending and sustained exit from county lines, gangs and exploitation-related activity to secure continued and increased investment.

The focus on criminal justice outcomes builds directly on our existing track record in this area and strengthens our position to secure further funding and commissioning opportunities, particularly in alignment with local and national priorities around youth justice, violence reduction and criminal exploitation.

We will take a proactive and strategic approach to sustainability, progressing targeted funding applications, strengthening partnerships with local authorities, youth justice services and Violence Reduction Units, and positioning the project for longer-term commissioned funding. Our strong evidence base and clear outcomes place us in a confident position to attract future investment.

Our established role within multi-agency systems further supports this. Through our involvement in local partnerships and decision-making structures, we are well placed to influence priorities, highlight gaps in provision and advocate for continued investment in specialist support for GYW affected by county lines and gang-related exploitation.

The project will also strengthen our internal capacity, including practitioner expertise, delivery models and established pathways, ensuring the approach can be sustained, adapted and expanded beyond the initial funding period.

Overall, this grant will act as a foundation for longer-term service development, enabling us to embed and grow targeted support for GYW at risk of criminalisation, while continuing to achieve strong, evidenced outcomes beyond the life of the funding.

Will you be receiving funding from any other sources for this project?

(Maximum 3000 characters)

We will not be receiving any funding from other sources for this project

Do all staff have enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks? If no please state why.

Yes

Reason why not all staff have DBS checks.

Total funding requested in this application (£30,000 to £100,000 with a maximum of £50,000 in one year)

£90000

Proposed grant start date	Proposed grant duration in months
11/23/2025	24

How much funding is required each year?

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
£45000	£45000	£

What was your organisation's expenditure in the most recent financial year?	What was your organisation's annual income in the most recent financial year?
£285851	£409538

What value of unrestricted reserves did your organisation have at the end of the most recent financial year?

£179069