

# VRU NEWS



Bringing you the latest news each quarter from the West Midlands Violence reduction Unit

Issue 1: April 2021

## INTRODUCTION

Devastatingly, many of our children know the sound of a gunshot, or live in such fear that they make plans about how to protect themselves. This violence is serious. It casts a wrecking ball through our communities and leaves a lasting impact on the people involved at either end of the weapon, on all who care for them, and on all who respond.

Many people and organisations are desperate for this violence to stop. No government department, law enforcement agency, organisation, community, group, or household has the means to achieve this alone. There is important work to do together to halt the tide of violence that is being experienced now, and to reduce the risks of violence in the future.

Whether you are receiving this update as a member of one of our networks, as a strategic stakeholder or as a concerned parent, a community member, or a young person – you have an important role to play. The job of the VRU is to help to knit all of that effort together, to direct energy towards activities that are more likely to make a difference, and to encourage organisations to take on the long term challenge of addressing root causes – including inequality.

Through this newsletter, our website, and the range of stakeholder forums we facilitate, we aim to help you to stay connected with our work, and to identify how to get involved. Over 200 people are already regularly engaged through the place-based pilot steering groups alone. In recent months colleagues across education, alternative provision, the health system, and organisations tackling criminal exploitation have come together in forums dedicated to helping their sector to play its part in preventing violence. Please reach out if you would like to join in.

**Clare Gollop | Director VRU**



## Localities Bulletin: A summary of activity in your area

Across the West Midlands, 9 pilot place-based projects are now operational in areas affected by violence. The projects aim to offer bespoke support to the locality, and test different approaches to violence reduction.

Each area has chosen different issues to focus upon, but our team of community navigators are able to help share promising practice between communities. If you are interested in adopting some of these approaches in your local area, please get in touch.

We've also embedded Education Intervention Advisers in each local authority area. They are working with inclusion teams, schools and alternative provision to make targeted support available to young people, and to help them develop protective behaviours.

# The coming year: work to come

We aim to grow this work over the coming year, and branch out into more places where the data indicates the risks of violence are high, but here are some key highlights to give a flavour of this work.



## Birmingham

### KING'S NORTON AND THREE ESTATES



- ✦ A local stakeholder network was established in December 2019. Its aim is to facilitate effective partnership working to prevent and reduce violence in the Three Estates. The network continues to develop and currently has 21 members.
- ✦ All school staff in Ark Academy secondary and primary schools are being trained in Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and Trauma Informed Practice (TIP) to support them in making more trauma informed decisions
- ✦ The ACEs and TIP training has also been undertaken by a wide range of other local organisations in your area including; Birmingham Youth Service, Sport Birmingham and MAD, Think Family, and local Police. We're looking forward to working with them to see how practices adapt.
- ✦ In response to the significant negative impact of lockdown on the wellbeing of many vulnerable young people, the VRU have funded InUnity to provide a dedicated mentoring service for our local children and young people. Within a couple of weeks, over 20 local young people were referred and are being supported. This support will continue post-lockdown.

### LOZELLS

- ✦ A local stakeholder network was launched in October 2020 to focus on violence prevention and reduction. There are over 20 members of the network currently which meets monthly. The network has worked together to respond to a number of recent tragedies.
- ✦ Detached youth workers have engaged with 385 young people.
- ✦ Early years settings have received Trauma Informed Practice training.
- ✦ Staff in youth service settings and 8 community champions have received training in County Lines, trauma, exploitation and contextual safeguarding.

## Coventry



- ✦ The local stakeholder network around the pilot in Hillfields has now grown to over 50 members. The newly established Wood End and Moat House (WEMH) stakeholder network has over 30 members so far. Different violence prevention projects and interventions have taken place in both pilot areas.
- ✦ We have launched the **#OurHillfields short film** which summarises and promotes our work in the Hillfields pilot.
- ✦ The **#OurHillfields Community Champion scheme** was launched in January. The training, volunteering, and employability initiative aims to equip local people with the skills and knowledge needed to help reduce violence in our community.
- ✦ The **10 Days of Peace campaign** launched on 12th March. It brought together voices from their communities in Coventry, including local young people and key education partners. It aimed to actively involve locals in celebrating what peace means to them and asking how they can make our communities more peaceful, using the **#passthepeace**.
- ✦ Funded by the Safer Streets Fund and supported by the VRU, the independent charity Fearless launched their **social media campaign** in Hillfields, aiming to raise awareness of crime among young people and their anonymous crime reporting service.
- ✦ To support local residents, we have produced a **booklet guide to local services in Hillfields**, available digitally and in print.



## Dudley



- ✦ The stakeholder network continues to meet fortnightly and has around 20 members. They are able to respond to local incidents and discuss any concerns in the community.
- ✦ A 'Team around the Community' has been developed to work together and respond to incidents, and emerging patterns and trends related to violence in St James' Ward.
- ✦ Intensive mentoring and family support is available. Work is being done with local alternative education provision to deliver workshops around County Lines and exploitation.
- ✦ A whole range of training including Trauma Informed Practice, Precious Lives and **Mentors in Violence Prevention** is being delivered to front line professionals to provide skills and support to those working with young people at risk of engaging in or being exposed to violence.

## Sandwell



- ✦ The Smethwick Against Violence Initiative (SAVI) is focused on providing specialist services to migrant and newly arrived communities, that will build resilience and prevent violence and exploitation in Smethwick.
- ✦ This pilot has seen us start to deliver core training in languages other than English, beginning with a Trauma Informed Practice course in Polish.
- ✦ We are working in partnership with the Local Authorities Fair Access team, and West Midlands Police Cadets to develop a robust transition pilot in schools, for pupils moving from Year 6 to secondary school.

## Wolverhampton



- This is one of our newest pilots, and was much interrupted by COVID-19. The project seeks to work with the community to deliver more targeted violence prevention and reduction work. The first area of focus is New Park Village.
- ✦ 'Funday' to take place on 3rd April. This will include detached youth work aiming to engage young people and to discuss their concerns within the area.
  - ✦ A digital lending library will be set up in April. Tablets will be made available for loan to residents to help with job applications, universal credit, courses etc.

## Solihull



- The pilot seeks to develop local infrastructure, in partnership with Solihull Youth Offending Service in Chelmsley Wood for young people to engage with positive activities, and to provide intensive, specialist support when they are at risk. The project will provide substance misuse prevention work, addressing addiction as a driver for violence.
- ✦ We are launching a new youth club in Solihull through Urban Heard in Chelmsley Wood.
  - ✦ We have increased our detached youth work to an extra 6 hours of delivery.
  - ✦ Flyers have been handed out around COVID-19 restrictions educating local people on guidelines.
  - ✦ ACES training has been booked for West Midlands Police and Solihull housing staff that are on the frontline, so they can make more trauma informed decisions.
  - ✦ A youth panel is being set up to support referring young people into the right services and organisations.

## Walsall



- The pilot project launched at Walsall College in December 2019, and expanded to Blue Coat CE Academy in September 2020. The scheme sees staff and students working together to embed a trauma informed approach in education settings.
- ✦ 860 education staff members have been trained on Trauma Informed Practice.
  - ✦ Adversity and trauma awareness sessions have been provided to 4,500 students.
  - ✦ Young people have been supported to deliver a series of webinars on youth violence and the impact of the lockdown. The series received 115 views from local professionals working with young people in a range of settings.
  - ✦ The specialist wellbeing hub has worked with 85 individuals, providing one to one support and counselling.
  - ✦ The network has worked together to respond to a number of recent serious incidents.



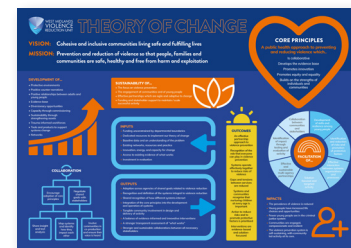


## When the worst happens

The VRU was established to help drive high level and sustained systems change in order to prevent violence. You'll read numerous examples in this newsletter of how we are starting to make that happen. But as we work towards a brighter future, serious acts of violence are still occurring. We have been working hard to develop the VRU's response in support of communities when the worst happens.

Organisations plan together for serious and overwhelming incidents like a train crash, but there is no statutory responsibility to have plans in place that make the multi-agency response to acts of serious youth violence more likely to run smoothly. Some of our local authorities have begun to work with us to prepare in advance, and to ensure that organisations are well placed to work together effectively to support the individuals, families, communities, and schools who are affected.

The VRU now has a presence in every local authority area, and our localities team can draw on wider support when serious incidents take place. This might include providing additional youth services, opportunities for communities to come together, targeted support for young people, for families, for wider groups, or for practitioners who are affected by the incident.



View our new 'Theory of Change' document online now at [westmidlands-vru.org/about](http://westmidlands-vru.org/about)

## Youth Engagement Framework | Theory of Change | Our Vision

All organisations want to believe they are engaging effectively with young people. Our steering group recognised that existing approaches don't always land well. With the help of Aspire4U, and team of young people we have developed a Youth Engagement Framework. This aims to help organisations understand how to access young people and build sustainable relationships with them. We're piloting the approach ourselves over the next month in a project seeking young people's views about youth mental health provision.

The development of the 'Theory of Change (TOC)' has been one of the key highlights in the evaluation space. A TOC is a description of why a particular way of working will be effective and then demonstrates how that change will happen in practical terms. It captures the vision and core values of the WM VRU.



# Thematic areas

We have identified several key areas of focus and activity, each contributing to the main mission of reducing violence across the region. Here are some key highlights in the different spaces



### TRAUMA INFORMED

We are committed to embedding Trauma Informed practice in to schools and organisations across the region. Our Community Navigators and Education Intervention Advisers have all been trained to deliver our ACEs and Trauma Informed Practice training, and to support organisations to be more aware of adverse life experiences and how to respond.

- + You can now access the **FREE online training** on our website. Delivered by our colleagues at Barnado's, the training aims to raise awareness of ACEs and equip those working with young people with the knowledge required to make more trauma informed decisions in your daily practice. Follow up support is also available.
- + The Dudley Safeguarding people partnership have also now launched an **e-learning version** of our ACEs and Trauma Informed modules.

+ Feedback from the live training webinars which have been delivered to over 400 participants, includes:

*" I've found the sessions particularly informative! It's made me, as a teacher, a parent, a friend, to re-evaluate my interaction. "*

*" I strongly agree that trauma is everyone's responsibility. Thanks for this training, super interesting, excellent content. "*



### CRIMINAL JUSTICE

We have focussed our efforts on integrating with the existing criminal justice system and policing structures, and developing a shared understanding of the importance of focusing on prevention.

- + We are working closely with West Midlands Police (WMP) to create conditions where it is more likely that indicators of violence and exploitation will be identified early, and to support the development of the Force's response to preventing violence and exploitation.
- + **Our Resettlement Programmes** and our Reachable Moments Programme linked to Custody have continued to provide a route out

of violence for those involved in or at risk of violence who have already come into contact with the criminal justice system.

- + The criminal justice system doesn't always recognise the role of parents or the impact on parents whose children have become involved in violence. We are supporting the seven Youth Offending Services to **upscale a peer support programme for parents**, funded by the Youth Justice Board (YJB).
- + We are working closely with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to raise awareness of indicators of exploitation and County Lines, to help communities understand the role of prosecutors, and to inform restructuring activity.



 EDUCATION

+ In partnership with the Education Observatory at the University of Wolverhampton, we co-hosted the annual Leading Schools in the West Midlands Conference. This brought together nearly 300 education leaders and researchers to address issues of social justice and inclusion in the education sector.



- + Our **Rewriting Futures report** has launched in collaboration with Behaviour Change and Revealing Reality. It explores the importance of alternative options to exclusion for our vulnerable children and young people.
- + We launched our **Education toolkit** which brings together the expertise of various disciplines across the education sector including Public Health, Educational Psychology, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Early Help. It has been co-produced by a number of Education professionals across the region to improve understanding of trauma and to provide guidance and support on how to help young individuals overcome difficult situations.
- + We presented “A school’s guide to Mentors in Violence Prevention” to schools across Birmingham in March, with a view to roll out to schools after Easter. This has generated high levels of interest in adopting **MVP – a bystander awareness programme** - in schools across the city. We plan to share this with other local authorities in coming months.



Weapon Homicide Reviews, the St Giles Trust County Lines Service and to reflect on lessons learnt from our work together on county lines. This multi-agency forum meets bimonthly to share good practice between organisations.

- + We have delivered exploitation training to Birmingham, Coventry, Sandwell, and Solihull WMP school link officers, and presented County Lines awareness sessions for **West Midlands Youth Commissioners**.
- + We’ve convened a regular forum that enables Directors of Childrens Services, Strategic leaders from Health and from the Police to explore opportunities to improve the way we work together to prevent exploitation.

 EXPLOITATION

- + The VRU supported a period of intensive action to tackle County Lines in February by co-ordinating activity of partners across the region and raising awareness online. We were instrumental in ensuring that activity led by partners, including awareness raising, prevention and support, was delivered alongside law enforcement activity.
- + The VRU launched **#WMExploitationWeek** on 15th March, a week-long regional campaign raising awareness of all forms of exploitation, coinciding with National Exploitation Awareness Day on 18th March (#CEADay21). The campaign brought together key partners and organisations working to tackle exploitation across the region.
- + February’s Regional Criminal Exploitation and Missing board gave partners the opportunity to explore an all age exploitation strategy, the Home Office proposals for Offensive



 HEALTH

- + Our interventions based in accident and emergency and other health settings have continued to deliver opportunities to exit violence for both adults and young people.

+ The NHSE Tackling Serious Violence forum has begun to meet, bringing together clinical leads and safeguarding specialists from the health agencies across the region. For more information please contact: Joanne Harrison, Assistant Director for Safeguarding and SEND, NHS England and NHS Improvement Midlands at [joanne.harrison@nhs.net](mailto:joanne.harrison@nhs.net).

+ We have developed an action plan for 21-22 that outlines how we wish to address community and individual-level inequality in order to support the violence reduction programme. Any agencies or groups that aren’t yet linked into this work, but feel they should be, or are interested in learning more, should contact Dr Emma Pearce, Public Health Registrar and Inequalities Lead at [emma.pearce@west-midlands.pnn.police.uk](mailto:emma.pearce@west-midlands.pnn.police.uk)

 SPORTS

- + In January, we presented to over 50 Premier League Football Club Foundations sharing the principles of violence reduction with both strategic and operational staff. Following this session, the VRU have continued to share best practice and learning with other Football Club Foundations around Exploitation and Youth Violence.
- + We aim for sports providers to be well equipped to support young people to deal with very challenging situations. Alongside strengthening referral pathways between providers and safeguarding agencies, we have made available training to help providers understand issues such as Mental Health, Unconscious Bias, Adverse Childhood Experiences, Trauma Informed Practices and County Lines.
- + The Holidays Activities and Food (HAF) programme brings significant investment from DfE to the regions local authorities. We are

able to help steer the delivery of activities in the holiday period to have the most impact they can for our most vulnerable young people, drawing on the principles of sports as a violence intervention approach. If you are involved in delivering HAF and aren’t already closely connected to your VRU link – please get in touch.



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