

VRU NEWS



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

Issue 2: October 2021

Introduction



Rates of violence and serious injury in the West Midlands are amongst the highest in the country. This leads to an increased fear of crime, a rise in mental and physical injuries suffered by members of our community and many preventable deaths. This isn't tolerable. We are thinking differently about how we bring about change.

The Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) has been established in order to help different systems (like policing, health, criminal justice, and education) to work more effectively together and to make sure that our collective energy is directed towards the circumstances where we can make the most difference in preventing future violence.

There are many people and organisations across the region already working to prevent violence and to tackle the root causes, like poverty and inequity. We are here to support their endeavours.

We help decision makers at every level, from frontline workers to senior leaders to access data and information about the nature of violence in the region, and to understand more about which interventions work best, in which contexts.

Change is most successful if it is designed and delivered by communities, so we also aim to strengthen the role that community voices have. This might mean engaging directly with, or helping other organisations to engage with;

- the people who live, work, or go to school in a specific place, through our local violence reduction networks
- different faith communities, through the Faith Alliance
- professional networks, through a range of different forums
- community-led enterprises and specialist providers
- groups of young people, through our emerging youth engagement structure
- and people with experience of issues linked to violence and exploitation.

We believe our diversity is our strength, and that there is something that every one of the 2.6 million people living in the region can do to help us to end violence. What could you do? How could we help you?

Who are we?

The VRU is a multi-agency partnership that involves all of the local authorities in the region, different parts of the health service, youth offending services, education representatives, faith leaders, CPS, policing and others



We work closely with West Midlands Police and our unit is hosted within the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, with our strategic board chaired by the PCC, Simon Foster. It's essential for our work that communities understand that the VRU is not the same as the police service. Indeed, we are one of the police's most critical friends.

The VRU has a strategic board which brings together representatives from the organisations outlined above to make decisions about our strategy and direction, and to identify ways that the organisations can work together more effectively. We also have a programme board which brings together practitioners from our core organisations to help shape the action that we are taking. In addition to this, we have a number of opportunities for people to get involved in other networks that we host.

At the moment we are funded by a central government grant from the Home Office, but some organisations, like the police, have started to invest by placing some of their staff within the VRU. This provides a great platform for staff development, and for organisations to learn about each other.

Our core grant is currently agreed year to year, which is incredibly frustrating for everybody. Nobody thinks this is a good way to deliver the generational change that is needed. We are working incredibly hard with central government and with our local strategic board to try to secure longer term investment in this important work. The Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner have stepped in to underwrite some of our activity but there is still some interruption to our delivery while new grants are arranged each year.

The VRU has a core team of staff who work to deliver system change activities. This means they are looking at ways to bring people together around persistent problems, to help develop new policies or good practice, and where there are gaps in services, to find ways to overcome this. We can do this in services by commissioning a small number of interventions ourselves; by attracting funding into the region or onto the topic; and by helping organisations to collaborate to make better use of existing resources.

Our core team have joined the VRU from a wide range of different professional backgrounds. A common reason for joining the team is a desire to change things that they recognised as problems within systems they were working in before. We are lucky to have experienced youth workers, teachers, police officers, social workers, health professionals, public health specialists, prison officers, working alongside people from policy or analytical backgrounds in faith communities, local authorities, sports settings, the OPCC and national government roles. This helps us to think in a lot of different ways about the challenges that communities and local partners raise, and hopefully, to help innovate and find solutions.



Insight and Analysis

Our insight team support organisations across the network to access data, information and analysis about the nature of serious violence in the region and about the factors that increase the risk of violence (www.wmvru-sna.org).

We publish information to help people have more informed discussions about violence, and to support commissioners and providers to bid for, and to target resources more effectively. A new **open access interactive map** helps you to explore the risk of violence in your area.

We have also published analysis about the profile of violence in the region **HERE** and to support local authority level partnerships to prepare for the new serious violence duty, we also publish analysis at a local authority level **HERE**. We'd love to hear from you if you have suggestions for additional data sources or ways to strengthen the analysis.

The team provide analytical support to all of the VRU's boards and delivery activity. They are also supporting a new data and analysis network made up of analysts and data owners in the region who are interested in working together to help test hypothesis and increase our knowledge about the nature of violence. Please get in touch if you would like to be involved!

What are we doing in your local area?

Local level working is the centre of gravity for the VRU. We aim to help all of our partner agencies deliver the best service that they can in the communities that are most disproportionately affected by violence



We can identify the places and issues that recorded crime and hospital admission data indicate are the biggest risks, and this helps us to focus our efforts. But most importantly, we are building local violence reduction networks to connect people in those places, so that everyone's activity is informed by a shared understanding of risks and concerns.

It takes time to build trust and credibility and to find out about the work that is already taking place in an area. At the moment we have local networks that meet regularly, identify ways to work together, and shape our local activity in the following places:

Hillfields (Coventry), Wood End and Moat House (Coventry), Three Estates (Birmingham), Lozells (Birmingham), Solihull North Stakeholder Group, SAVI (Sandwell), Dudley Stakeholders Network

You can find out how to get involved by contacting vru@westmidlands.pnn.police.uk

The VRU has provided at least one community navigator and an education intervention adviser in each of the seven local authority areas. They help to bring these networks together and to co-ordinate activity between partners. They also help the local community access support from the wider VRU specialists. Because they are part of a bigger regional

team, they can also help research promising practice and connect communities or schools with others who are trying to overcome similar challenges elsewhere.

We aim to grow these networks 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 the network's activity. If you are interested in adopting some of these approaches in your local area, even if it is outside the list where we are currently active, please get in touch.



Birmingham

KING'S NORTON AND THREE ESTATES

- ✦ We have co-ordinated and facilitated the ongoing Three Estates open public meetings for residents with local Police and partners who have jointly agreed action points to address key community issues and build mutual trust between residents and Police
- ✦ We supported InUnity to develop and deliver mentoring for children and young people and we now have over 22 local young people being mentored on a one to one and group basis; the provision being tailored to suit their individual needs.

SPARKBROOK AND SPARKHILL

- ✦ We have developed a Sparkbrook and Sparkhill Get Connected multi-stakeholder Provider Network, with quarterly meetings now established in partnership with the local Police Inspector and the Bahu Trust.
- ✦ We have established a Get Connected Domestic Abuse local partnership action group – with Neema Women. A key action to come out of this group includes training up local community based organisations (Neema Women, Anawim, Hall Green Families / Early Help) regarding taking effective domestic abuse witness statements and evidence, and how to secure injunctions which enable women to access these without having to pay for support to do so if they are in paid work.
- ✦ We have supported Nourish Social develop a youth podcast focussing on young people's views and experience of violence and crime, including gangs, knives and county lines. We are working develop a sustainable approach to enable an ongoing podcast with local young people.



Birmingham

BIRMINGHAM WEST



- ✦ The Stakeholder Network continues to grow from Lozells into surrounding areas, this network exists to bring partners together, a chance for information sharing and developing working relationships which will lead to effective impact in localities.
- ✦ ACEs and Trauma training continues to be delivered to increase the awareness of the impact of ACEs and childhood trauma on an individual's life course. Both education institutions and community based organisations are taking advantage of this free training. We are also working on promoting and implementing the Mentors in Violence Prevention Programme across schools in Birmingham West. For more information on this training package please reach out to our EIA's.
- ✦ Due to the many critical incidents that have taken place in the locality, we have continued to create links with colleagues in the police, to offer support at the outset of critical events which include identifying appropriate provision, engaging with networks to share updates and targeting out mentoring offer.
- ✦ This quarter we launch the VRU Delivery Budget This funding is focussing on three strands - Outreach, Mentoring and Diversionary Activities. We are confident that we will have effective, proven and impactful provision in place ready for the Autumn.
- ✦ We are developing a training and action research group, focussing on the needs and wants of the localities, we want to provide opportunities for communities to access learning and skills which can help them in their communities. We are working with BCT, YOS, Gangs team, community safety team and others to bring this all together.
- ✦ The Birmingham West Community Navigator continued their quarterly community agency/partner walks. This quarter took him to Newtown and Handsworth. In attendance were: EmpowerU Hub (BCT), Children's Society, Youth Service, Exploitation Team, a Local Providers. The purpose of the community walks is to be present in the communities we work in. The walks have highlighted the need for communities to receive training, accreditation and upskilling in certain topics so that they can continue to be an asset in their communities.



Coventry



- ✦ A new #OurHillfields Environment Working Group has been set up to bring together partners in response to local environmental issues and to help make Hillfields a safer, cleaner, and more accessible place for children, young people and families.
- ✦ The WEMH (Wood End and Moat House) stakeholders meeting meets monthly and is chaired by a local community leader. A Community Reference Group has also been set up and will bring together local people to address issues and raise aspirations in the community.
- ✦ A Mentors in Violence Prevention schools guide has been rolled out for both primary and secondary schools. There has been good uptake for the MVP and we will be running more sessions in September.



What Dudley NAVIGATE Participants said...

“ Really makes you empathise and think about the way you word/question things. ”

“ It has given me the confidence to have open and honest conversations with our care experienced YP. ”

“ It was great training, it will help me connect with teenagers/young adults during my direct work with them and to know some of the signs to look out for. ”

Dudley



- ✦ The St. James'+ Stakeholder Network remains strong and continues to meet every fortnight. It includes representatives from the voluntary sector (substance misuse, exploitation, youth support services, the local authority (Safeguarding, Parenting support, Youth Service, Youth Offending Team, family support, community Safety,) and CIC's (Exploitation, youth activities) and the police service to name a few. The Network is intending to expand to support young people throughout the Dudley borough and may be renamed to reflect this change in focus.
- ✦ Trauma Informed Practice training was delivered to the Dudley Community Volunteer Service. Feedback has been excellent and further training around Adverse childhood Experiences (ACE's) are planned for the next quarter.
- ✦ The Network through Barnardos NAVIGATE has delivered 2 training events in April around Child Criminal exploitation. Participants included Single assessment practitioners, Care management, Early Help, Family Solutions, Police, YOS teams and the Voluntary sector. A total of 63 professionals attended the training and a few quotes from participants are shown above right:
- ✦ Operation Heptatonic took place in July 2021 around the impact areas of Dudley, mainly Dudley central and Brierley Hill. The operation focussed on under 25's violence, drug dealing and possession of offensive weapons. The police also deployed various police tactics during this week such as Knife arches', stop and search, traffic enforcement, drugs warrants and increased police presence within our transport hubs. Our team went out with police officers during that period to get a glimpse of the work of the police and to engage with the public in terms of community safety, violence prevention/reduction. It is intended that through their local partnerships this joint-working arrangement will be repeated in the future.
- ✦ OT County Lines Programme: A 15 week group programme around county lines awareness was delivered to students at Sycamore Short Stay school and was completed at the end of July 2021. This was delivered by Real Info, a local organisation which produces audio-visual and interactive resources for young people. The programme aimed to give the students an awareness of the realities of county lines, to show how easily victims can be 'groomed' and to seek help when needed. It is hoped that this OT County Lines programme can be rolled out to other schools in Dudley. There was very positive feedback from all the students who completed the programme and this work will be followed up by the use of parent/student packs filled with exercises and discussion ideas that parents and carers can have with their children.

Solihull

- ✦ We supported Urban Heard to create a professional music studio. Urban Heard delivers activity which challenges the damaging aspects of encouraging violence and gang lifestyle by combining mentoring and lyricism as a creative outlet and therapy, whilst also exploring different types of beats and mixes



Walsall

- ✦ Training scheduled for ACEs, TIP, MVP – available for all professionals between September and April 2022.
- ✦ Launched monthly webinars on the Public Health Approach to Reducing Youth Violence – available for all professionals between September and April 2022.
- ✦ Working with Base 25 to deliver specialist mentoring for young people taking referrals from schools, virtual schools, exploitation hub and NPU
- ✦ St Giles are hosting a parents and carers conference to raise awareness of the signs of exploitation in October
- ✦ Diversionary activities via Street Teams who are working with Walsall Football club to deliver weekly sessions for young people



Wolverhampton

- ✦ Over the next year, our focus will be on the following areas: Low Hill, Bushbury, Heath Town
- ✦ There has been the implementation of three bleed kits and we are helping to roll this out alongside training into schools/communities - this will be where the VRU Wolverhampton funding is allocated.
- ✦ Alongside the community safety team, we are developing a Violence Prevention Board.
- ✦ We are commencing our intense mentoring across the WV10 area and this will run through ISAP and the exploitation hub.



Sandwell

- ✦ Sandwell Community School (PRU) completed MVP training- 6 members of staff completed the training over two days. Staff were impressed with the content and delivery of training and discussed ways they could implement the programme within their setting. Staff discussed that many of their young people succumbed to peer pressure especially around truanting from school and needed to develop the necessary leadership skills to challenge behaviour amongst their peers. The school has 4 campuses in total and the aim is to roll out the training within all settings from September.
- ✦ ACEs training delivered to Sandwell College- 30 people attended the training from a range of different roles within the college. The feedback received was extremely positive and the college are planning on booking onto the Trauma Informed Practice training in the new academic year.
- ✦ Delivery of MVP taster session at Sandwell Fair Access Development day- This event was held at the Holiday Inn, Great Barr with secondary schools from across Sandwell. Attendees received a 1 hour MVP taster session where they got the opportunity to experience what the programme entails and how delivery could look in their setting. 3 schools have already booked in to receive the full training programme from September.
- ✦ Poverty Proofing- A 1 hour session was delivered to introduce the poverty proofing training, 2 full days of training followed on from this with staff and a lead has been identified for each visit to the schools. The training was thorough and schools are already starting to think about what changes to make as a result of it. All of the primary schools involved are in Smethwick- Cape, Victoria Park and Crocketts.



How do young people feel about youth engagement?



Listening to young people and enabling them to help shape services that work with them, or influence decisions that will affect their future is absolutely key to effective delivery. A lot of the organisations that we work with already have some form of youth engagement activity in place, but want to find out more about how to strengthen this.

We asked Aspire4U to work with young people from across the region to develop a youth engagement framework that any organisation could use to review their existing practice. The young people and youth workers came up with a number of great suggestions to help organisations develop stronger relationships with young people, and especially those from communities whose voice is more rarely heard in typical youth engagement forums.

The young people fed back earlier this year and encouraged the VRU board to pilot their framework to see the difference that it made. They wanted to share their views on youth mental health services.

The framework, the supporting operations manual, and the report about mental health services will all be made available on our website soon. Are there some ideas here that could strengthen your organisations work with young people?

We are using the framework to help us launch a new youth engagement structure for the VRU. Through the last year our commissioned providers have done some great work to help us ask young people their views on a range of topics, from new legislation to feelings of safety in an area. But we have really felt the absence of having consistent engagement with young people to help shape our overall direction and advise our leadership team, and so we are excited about this next step. More information coming soon.

Simon Foster, the Police and Crime Commissioner launches a consultation on priorities for the police and crime plan

The police and crime plan sets out the commissioner's ambition for the work of West Midlands Police, the OPCC and also their aims to achieve through partnership with others, including the VRU network. As such it's a key document for everyone who wishes to influence the way in which the police and partners prevent, respond to, and mitigate serious violence.

A number of organisations and individuals submitted evidence earlier this year to inform the first stage of the police and crime plans development, and we were able to bring them together with the PCC and Assistant PCCs in a roundtable to discuss issues linked to violence and exploitation.

The consultation has explored community and youth voice which will inform the plan, likely to be published in October.



Increasing practitioner's knowledge about trauma, and responses to trauma

The VRU has two Trauma Informed trainers from Barnado's embedded within the team, and they have helped to upskill a number of our delivery team members to deliver training programmes. We now have three courses on offer across the region

- + An Introduction to Adverse Childhood Experiences, which looks at the background to ACEs and the most appropriate ways to apply this research
- + An Introduction to Trauma Informed Practice, which builds on this to help practitioners understand how to recognise and to be more trauma aware
- + Trauma Informed organisations, which provides support for organisations to help them review and embed trauma informed practice in the way they operate.

Together this quarter we have trained a further 419 people in one of the courses from our trauma awareness training programme. Those professionals trained reported working with 9733 people on a regular basis who could now benefit from the greater knowledge professionals have around the impacts of trauma and its links with violence.

You can find out more about arranging delivery of these (currently free) courses in your organisation, or access recorded webinars that cover much of the course material via our website

We are beginning to offer delivery in languages other than English, and are interested to hear from people who might be able to support delivery of these courses.

Trauma informed and attachment aware schools

We are developing plans with the Educational Psychology teams across the region to explore the use of a regional certification model for trauma-informed and attachment aware schools. This is designed to encourage more education providers to adopt these methods of working. Please contact us for more information!

A Trauma Informed police service

The police are often involved with people at highly traumatic times in their life, and a number of police activities can be trauma inducing for all of the people involved. Recognising the signs of trauma and adapting processes where legislation and policy allow could help the police to respond more effectively to violence, as well as to other kinds of crimes.

We have recently secured additional funding to develop some specific Trauma Informed training for the police service (nationally). WMP and the OPCC have agreed to help us to pilot some of this training, through a large-scale trauma awareness programme within some specific police departments here in the West Midlands.

To help us deliver this, we are actively recruiting Trauma Informed trainers. Please spread the word! Vacancies are advertised here.

THE CENTRAL VRU TEAM IS ORGANISED AROUND SEVERAL THEMATIC AREAS

- + Education
- + Faith
- + Trauma-Informed practice
- + Exploitation and Abuse
- + Health
- + Criminal Justice
- + Sports

Specialists in each of these systems are working to find ways to contribute more effectively to violence reduction activity. This might be by engaging at a national level to shape policy or investment, or by mapping the local system to understand opportunities to improve, or providing some dedicated coordination, training, or policy development activity. Leads also help their thematic areas access training and support.



EDUCATION

The West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit is working with the education sector to ensure every child gets access to a good quality education.

There are over 1,233 primary and secondary schools and hundreds of alternative education settings, further education and training providers across the West Midlands. It means the education sector is engaged with thousands of children, young people and families, fostering a passion for learning and high aspirations.

We know all children and young people have different levels of need and we want to focus our efforts on ensuring those with additional and different needs, receive the right support at the right time. Our commitment is to support and enable those working in the education, training and employment sector to join together in their approach to learning, creating positive outcomes for all.

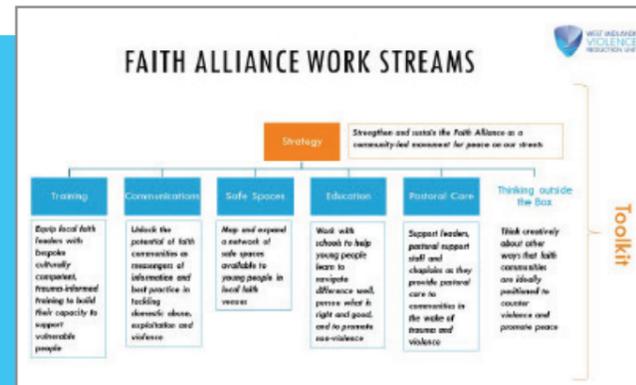
The Education Team within the Violence Reduction Unit:

- + Works in schools to deliver training which promotes resilience and reduces risks to vulnerable children and young people who experience violence in their lives.
- + Supports the training and development of education staff to promote a whole school approach to children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing.
- + Helps schools adopt tried and tested methods to prevent young people being drawn into activities that may lead to violence.
- + Links the support offered by schools, partners and communities to ensure all children get the support and opportunity they need to fulfil their potential and stay in mainstream education.
- + Brings together experts within education so they can share, develop and influence educational approaches that support social, emotional and mental health of young people at risk or affected by violence.



THE FAITH ALLIANCE

- + The Faith Alliance is a regional network bringing together faith leaders, groups and organisations around the violence reduction agenda. The Faith Alliance exists to help equip, enable and empower communities of all faiths and none across the West Midlands to further understand and help prevent serious youth violence.
- + The Faith Alliance, consisting of over 110 members from across the region, meets quarterly and is chaired by two regional faith leaders. Supported by VRU staff, the Faith Alliance is designing and implementing a violence reduction strategy that combines the Public Health Approach with Faith-based approaches, including spiritual, moral, social and ethical perspectives.
- + Work is underway to produce a Violence Reduction Toolkit for Faith Communities that will help equip faith communities in the West Midlands and beyond to better support vulnerable young people and tackle the roots causes of violence.
- + Underpinning this work are several Faith Alliance working groups which will meet monthly. Each working group will collate and share best



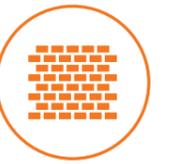
practice by faith communities in the following areas:

- Training
- Communications
- Youth Spaces
- Education
- Pastoral Care

+ Plans are developing to establish work streams supporting faith communities to take action in the areas of training, communications, safe spaces, education and pastoral care.

We would love to hear from you if you are interested in joining the Faith Alliance, either as an individual or an organisation. Please contact us at vr@west-midlands.pnn.police.uk

Strengthening our response to tackling exploitation



The VRU now has a team of three regional strategic exploitation leads, with Bethan Lonsdale working to support the build and implementation of the SOCEX hubs across the region and Zeba Chowdhury working towards tackling and preventing exploitation in the Criminal Justice space joining Jade Hibbert.

The increase in our team was funded by West Midlands Police to help the force and the Regional Organised Crime Unit to look more widely at partnership options to prevent criminal exploitation, county lines and wider forms of exploitation and hidden harms.

The VRU and OPCC work together to host and coordinate the four West Midlands multi-agency exploitation and abuse boards, which focus on different types of exploitation and hidden harms such as (Domestic Abuse, Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, Modern Slavery/ Human Trafficking and Criminal Exploitation & Missing (CEM)).

The VRU chairs and leads on the delivery of the Regional Strategic Criminal Exploitation and Missing (CEM) board, which meets bi-monthly. This forum shares good practice between local authority exploitation teams and wider partners. The VRU also convenes a quarterly strategic exploitation board which brings together executives from health, policing, and children's services to find ways for the system to work together more effectively.

Pieces of work taking place from the CEM board (from May through to September 2021) are around:

- + developing a "plugging protocol" for C/YP who have been made to conceal drugs as part of their exploitation when they present in Police custody
- + a working group has been set up with multi agency partners around non British people who are trafficked in to the WM and how services can better respond to the required safeguarding of this vulnerability cohort
- + creation of a regional policy to effectively place C/YP and their families at risk of youth violence and or exploitation

July's Strategic Exploitation Interface forum discussed:

- + proposed regional exploitation and abuse data set
- + introduction of a regional policy to support more effective planning of placements for children and young people (and their families) at significant risk of exploitation.
 - local interfaces in SOCEX and non-SOCEX areas
 - Serious Violence Duty being a significant lever for system change
 - VRU support for schools and the education system



The team worked with the national policing portfolio for Modern Slavery and the NCA to deliver a webinar for all 43 police forces to launch a guide to safeguarding Roma children from exploitation. This showcased the good practice guide and research carried out by Barnardo's ICTA team. More information can be found here. This built on a regional launch of the same guide earlier in the quarter.

The VRU Exploitation team created a Regional Sexual Exploitation Awareness & Modern Slavery Training Programme for September 2021 Operation Aidant and over the 12 sessions delivered by our partners, we had approximately 1448 attendees participate from across the West Midlands region and beyond! The team also created a Sexual Exploitation and Modern Slavery Communications Pack – The Op Aidant communications campaign aimed to raise awareness of Sexual Exploitation and Modern Slavery across the West Midlands. The campaign was run on Twitter and Facebook and was received well with 97.0K impressions on Twitter and reaching 5572 users on Facebook.

The VRU have been successful in being awarded funding to commission the St Giles Trust Rescue and Response Service to support WM C/YP who are arrested outside of the WM who have an exploitation concern and then will be immediately referred into immediate 1 to 1 mentoring to empowering those young people to exit a world of exploitation, along with piloting St Giles Trust to provide support to the L.A missing return home process to ensure resilience in the system and reduce episodes of missing across the region.

The team have also been preparing to increase awareness around child criminal exploitation through a programme of events that are planned throughout October 2021.



HEALTH

- + The NHS Tackling Serious Violence Midlands wide forum continues to meet and brings together practitioners from across the health service to identify ways for the health sector to help prevent violence. To get involved please contact us.
- + We have teams of specialist youth workers busy across a number of hospitals in the West Midlands, based from the Accident & Emergency departments. The moments of intense crisis, when a young person is nursing an injury in the daunting environment of a busy hospital, often alone, can be a catalyst for pursuing positive change – a 'reachable moment'. The youth workers offer the opportunity to talk and plan what is needed to address any underlying issues and interrupt the cruel cycle of violence which many young people get caught in. The stories of impact and change which come from these services are always powerful testimony to the change that's possible when the right support is available at the right time. Watch out next time for more news on new services which are launching!



VIOLENCE REDUCTION THROUGH SPORTS

- + We now have two team members from StreetGames UK embedded within the VRU team. Glen White, our Sport Impact Manager joins us with a wealth of experience from across Youth Justice sector having previously worked for two Youth Offending Teams and on a number of innovative programmes to reduce and prevent youth violence. Paul Blagrove, our Sport Coordinator joins us with years of experience in community sport and youth engagement working on the frontline and overseeing the national Premier League Kicks programme.
- + We are planning a series of training and learning events to continue to support those working across the sport and physical activity sector understand their role in preventing and reducing violence. These sessions will build on the work carried out last year using current research and promoting what works in tackling violence through sports. Please check our Eventbrite page for more details. If you would like to join our Sports Partnership and find out more, please get in touch.

Holidays Activities and Food Fund

This year the Department for Education provided c.£220m of additional funding to local authorities to co-ordinate free holiday provision, including healthy food and enriching activities for disadvantaged children and young people; in particular those eligible for free school meals.

The West Midlands is in receipt of c.£17m and will deliver HAF across all local authority areas, with Birmingham being the largest programme in England (c.70,000 FSM children).

Beyond the programmes focus on free school meal eligibility, some local authorities had approval to utilise a proportion of the budget to reach those young people further disadvantaged or vulnerable including LAC, children living in temporary accommodation, SEND and disability and those at risk of crime, violence and exploitation.

Partnership working has been key to the success of the programme this summer, along with good governance, programme infrastructure and senior leadership. The role of the community and voluntary sector in reaching vulnerable children and young people should be commended and built upon for the future.

In October 2021, a decision will be made as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review regarding future HAF investment.



Preventing Serious Violence: A national conversation



Some issues linked to reducing violence require action at a national rather than a regional level. The network of 18 VRUs collaborated last month to host an online conference that provided a platform for a prevention first focus on a number of policy issues, followed by a closed seminar between government officials and VRU Directors. Content and recordings from the day will soon be made available on our website.



Adolescent Wellbeing & Violence Reduction

Lib Peck, the London VRU Director hosted Dr Carlene Firman and Ben Lindsay to discuss the importance of contextual safeguarding and of culturally competent services embedded in communities.

Education and Inclusion

Our own Director, Clare Gollop, hosted Sarah Dove, President of PRUsAP - the National Association for PRUs and Alternative Provision; Charlotte Ramsden, President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services; Dan Owen, national leader for Behaviour and Accountability in a MAT Network and former OFSTED Behaviour Lead; and Dr Louisa Jones, Principal Educational Psychologist – Worcestershire Children First. This session focused on the complex issue of exclusion and risks surrounding young people who are no longer in school.

A Child-focused Youth Justice System

Andrew Ryan, the Merseyside VRU Director hosted Keith Fraser – Chair of the Youth Justice Board to discuss some of the issues, challenges and opportunities linked to a child-first approach within the criminal justice system. Pippa Goodfellow – Director of the Alliance for Youth Justice spoke about the challenges facing young women when transitioning into the adult justice system.

The Role of Policing in Partnership with VRUs

Jackie Marsh, West Yorkshire VRU Director hosted senior policing leaders from West Yorkshire to discuss the difference

having a VRU meant for them, and ACC Jacqui Sebire, the National Police Chiefs Council portfolio lead for serious violence outlined the national landscape.

Community-led Approaches to Reducing Violence

Hosted by Damian Dallimore, Merseyside VRU with Kimberly Lamb, Director of the Bedfordshire VERU. Residents, young people, and community members discussed what it means to be involved in violence reduction activity and reflected on this with speakers from The Children's Society.

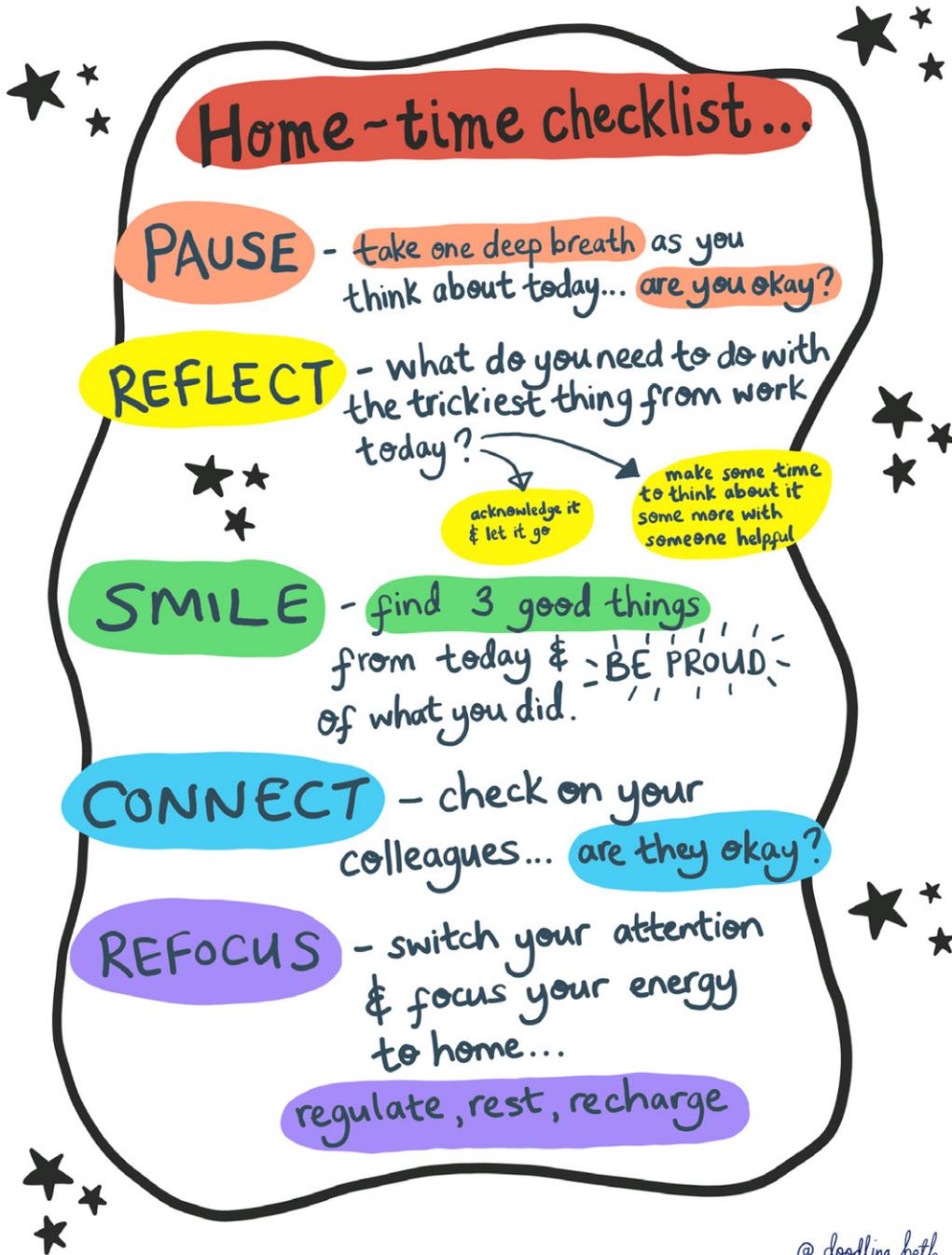
Spotlight on one of our key interventions:

Resettlement Programme: The VRU is supporting young people in Wolverhampton, Coventry and Birmingham who are nearing the end of their sentence within a prison or young offender's institute. The aim is to help them make their transition back into society as successful as possible. The project looks to provide support in the form of accommodation, finance, employment, mental and physical health and social and emotional issues.

A significant proportion of the young people who enter the criminal justice system have a wide range of pre-existing vulnerabilities and have experienced significant trauma, which can be compounded by time in custody. This programme looks at all of the vulnerabilities the person may have, with a view to mitigating and supporting them so they avoid re-engaging with harmful situations or returning to custody. This could take the form of training, counselling, food parcels and domestic abuse packs.

Wellbeing Checklist

At the VRU, we wholly believe that we are all responsible for each other's wellbeing. It is incredibly important we take care of those around us as well as ourselves. Take a moment to check in with yourself using the checklist below.



@doodling beth