



Catch 22

Wolverhampton Violence Reduction Service:
Community Services
Evaluation

Final Report

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Ethical Approval

Approval for the research informed portion of this evaluation was granted by Newcastle University September 11th, 2021 (11017/2020) and updated on May 9th, 2022 (2315/17634).

“I think the personal relationships of the people running the programme is key. Not only what they’re doing but also what they know and how they go about what they do” - Stakeholder 1

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Background

Since its inception in 2011, the WVRS has grown from providing only youth support work and school interventions, into a multi-service group. The WVRS is now comprised of a Prison Resettlement service and a Community Service. This evaluation focuses solely on the Community Service as this comprises the original youth support and school intervention work covered in the first two reports (see Appendices A and B). The Community Service's purpose remains the provision of early intervention and prevention to young people who are at risk of harm from gang activities. It also supports at-risk of and fully gang entrenched young people to identify viable alternatives to the gang lifestyle, violent activities, and antisocial behaviour.

1.2 Key Findings

The evaluation research question sought to determine whether the WVRS Community Service activities address a local need, and whether its services can be evidenced through outcomes and impact. When taken together, the overall findings of this evaluation indicate that not only is the WVRS Community Service needed and valued within Wolverhampton, but they also offer a unique skillset that has helped the local schools to combat violence and address antisocial behaviour. The Community Service has positively influenced individual young people and their families to prevent or desist activities that could have wider implications within the city and surrounding areas.

The following key findings are of note:

- ❖ The WVRS Community Service has seen exponential expansion and improvements to their services and operations over the last two years.
- ❖ The WVRS Community Service is highly respected for their expertise and ability to reach young people that no other statutory or professional service can.
- ❖ The support workers are passionate about the service and frequently go above and beyond to assist the people they support.
- ❖ The local schools rely heavily on the Youth Support Workers presence and delivery of interventions to assist them with preventing and reducing violence, other undesirable behaviours, and eventual exclusions.
- ❖ Wolverhampton continues to see increases in bladed weapons offenses despite the efforts of local law enforcement initiatives and commissioned interventions. This suggests a complex social issue that needs to be addressed in a variety of ways (e.g., professional training, multi-service partnerships, more youth support workers, education, and awareness training).
- ❖ A lack of secure long-term funding limits the impact and reach of the service.
- ❖ The Community Service makes a real impact in the lives of people and communities it supports, and this is best evidenced in the short- to mid-term through anecdotal feedback and narratives.

1.3 Future Development & Recommendations

The recommendations for the WVRS Community Service can be summarised into two main categories: 1) a need to develop processes to capture and evidence tangible impact in the local community, and 2) to secure a funding cycle that will allow for stability and growth. The information used to assess the Community Service and its team indicates a successful offer delivered by knowledgeable and dedicated staff. With the appropriate level of financial support, there is clear evidence that the Community Team could produce proof of their local impact and wider reach.

Overall Recommendations

1. Secure a funding stream that allows for the continuance of the youth support work and the ability to dedicate resources to embedding evaluation of impact into the service delivery.
2. Create a follow-up procedure for service users who leave or complete the one-to-one mentoring intervention to determine longitudinal influence and impact.
3. Create a follow-up process for schools and the young people who complete the Anger and Emotions programme to determine longitudinal influence and impact.
4. Have the Anger and Emotions programme independently evaluated and assessed for therapeutic fidelity and properties of longitudinal behaviour change.
5. Apply the recommendations already provided to streamline the delivery of the Gang Awareness Training
6. Create a follow-up process for participants of the Gang Awareness training to determine longitudinal influence on professional practice and to demonstrate impact through partner services and organisations

“They help people like me. People who grew up in a negative background and stuff” – Young Person

2. Introduction

Despite the UK government's initiatives to reduce violence, it remains a persistent issue particularly involving youths and gangs. Last year (2021), approximately 12,700 children were referred to children's services with 'gang involvement' identified as a concern within their intake assessments (Department for Education, 2021). Across the country, there was a 37% increase in young people under 18 years old admitted to hospital due to assault with a sharp or bladed weapon between 2016 and 2019. This was an overall increase of 57% since 2015 (NHS, 2019), and in some parts of England, this number remains high. The difficulty in reducing violence stems from the complex circumstances that underpin violent actions. Although there are several factors that contribute to youth violence and gang activity, there is mounting evidence that childhood adversity is a leading root cause (Salo et al., 2021).

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have been related to an increased risk of serious and persistent offending throughout adolescence and adulthood (Craig et al., 2017). Researchers have demonstrated that ACEs negatively influence early brain development, which in turn affects thinking and emotions throughout the life course (Gray et al., 2021). Specifically, young people in families with low socio-economic status or who live in economically deprived areas during their childhood are at a greater risk of experiencing prolonged exposure to adverse situations and maltreatment (Walsh et al., 2019). An American study observed that the higher the number of self-reported ACEs within middle-school aged children, the higher the chance of self-reported delinquency and violence (Duke et al., 2010). The findings revealed that each additional ACE increased the risk of violent altercations amongst students by 65% and the risk of carrying a weapon by 74%.

A systematic review of evidence has identified ACEs and subsequent poor mental health as being positively associated with youth and gang violence in young people aged 10-24 (Haylock et al., 2020). A further systematic review of 124 studies across 13 countries reported that almost 87% of young people involved in the justice system have experienced at least one traumatic event in their short lives. When compared to non-justice-involved youth, the likelihood of having experienced at least one ACE was nearly 12 times higher for justice-involved young people (Malvaso et al., 2021).

The presence of ACEs can exacerbate behaviour that are statistically associated with an increased likelihood of violence and gang activity. For example, school exclusions are a known risk factor for young males to turn to gangs and other antisocial behaviour. Exclusions have been shown to have long-term negative implications, such as an increased risk of criminality, crime victimisation, and imprisonment (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). However, between 2019 and 2020 there were 5,057 young people permanently excluded from school in England and Wales (Department for Education, 2021). It should be noted that this number includes a period in 2020 when school sites were closed due to a global pandemic, with exceptions made for the children of critical workers. Thus, it begs the question as to how or why these young people

were excluded if they were not physically at school. It has been determined that many of these children were vulnerable and unable to participate due to lack of access to technology or broadband. Some children did not attend because they were simply missing (Center for Social Justice, 2021). In 2019, 7,354 young people were recorded missing by police, and emerging evidence suggests that this was worse during the pandemic lockdowns when even more children were reported missing from residential care. These figures also highlight that this phenomenon disproportionately affected children who were not from a White British background (O'Brien et al., 2021). Further evidence suggests that missing children are at higher risk for exploitation (Sharp-Jeffs, 2016) or being groomed to aid in gang activity and offending behaviour (Heerde et al., 2014).

Gang affiliation and membership has a complex etiology, with a variety of precursors that often occur simultaneously and across several risk factors such as family, individual characteristics, social settings, peer groups, and environmental factors (Raby & Jones, 2016). In one study, conduct issues, mental distress, guilt-proneness, anxiety, depression, moral disengagement, and rumination were compared in a sample of 91 non-gang and gang-involved youth (Frisby-Osman & Wood (2020). The study found that anxiety, despair, moral disengagement, and rumination were highest in gang-involved youth. Although gang-involved adolescents exhibited greater levels of behaviour disorder and violent exposure, they did not significantly vary from non-gang youth in terms of emotional distress or guilt-proneness. Therefore, to effectively tackle gang-involvement, interventions that target these factors are needed – particularly through support and mentoring.

Youth Support Work

Young people who participate in meaningful activities and who develop new skills with trusted adults and peers are more likely to develop the attributes necessary for a positive adulthood (Butts et al., 2010). Individualised approaches based on specific needs and family support have been identified as key elements for success in youth support interventions, which can be provided by offering activities and skill-building opportunities specific to an individual (Brooks & Khan, 2015). Tolan and colleagues (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of 46 mentoring interventions spanning four decades (1970-2011) and found that antisocial acts, aggression, drug use, and academic performance were all reduced for mentored youth. Again, the overall statistical effects were small to modest, but these findings indicate that mentoring has positive effects for those at risk of behaviour often associated with childhood adversity and gang involvement.

A later meta-analysis of 73 independent evaluations of mentoring programmes for young people (1999–2010) found support for the effectiveness of mentoring interventions in improving outcomes across behavioural, social, emotional, and academic domains (DuBois et al., 2011). These findings speak to mentoring's adaptability and broad application as an approach for facilitating positive youth outcomes. However, there remains a lack of

evaluation to measure key outcomes such as juvenile offending or recidivism. Moreover, positive outcome measures within the meta-analysis were observed to be modest for the typical young person with only nine percentile points differing between mentored and non-mentored young people. However, it is arguable that any improvement is of value, and that changing even one life for the better has a positive ripple effect for the community and society.

Gang Violence and Violence Reduction Services

Violence is only one consequence of gang activity. Gangs are often directly involved in glamourizing violence and gang lifestyle (e.g., drill music and music videos), they groom young people to attract and entrap their peers into the gangs (e.g., at schools and within the community) and they regularly exploit children and young people (e.g., county lines and sex trafficking). These activities are often conducted in an insidious way and surrounded by secrecy; however, there are often identifiable warning signs when a young person has become involved with a gang either 'voluntarily' or as a victim (De Vito, 2021).

There are several initiatives in the UK to address and intervene in gang involved youth and adults. Some of these interventions are part of large-scale operations such as the Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV), whilst others exist as small grass-roots organisations and charities. Most of these interventions take a support work approach mixed with programmes that target the underlying causes of gang involvement such as financial hardship, education, housing, security and feeling safe. However, there remains a lack of evidence that demonstrates the effects and impact of established, long-term interventions specific to tackling gang violence. Arguably, the main issue is the inability to evidence specific outcomes in violence reduction back to the interventions themselves. That is, these interventions do not operate in a vacuum, and many of the young people and their families are involved with statutory services and receive multi-agency support. In addition to this, there are likely several community and policing initiatives put into effect concurrently to tackle gang activity locally and regionally. This situation makes it impossible to attribute one specific intervention with the success of any crime or violence reduction. Unfortunately, this reality of intangible outcomes for smaller initiatives sometimes results in funding cuts or the dissolution of the initiative (Irwin-Rogers et al., 2020).

Evaluation and research evidence highlights the importance of considering soft outcomes such as changes in attitude, alongside hard outcomes such as individual desistance when measuring success of violence reduction initiatives. Often this evidence lies within individual anecdotes and qualitative research approaches. For example, a six-month intervention aimed at diverting at risk young people away from serious organised crime demonstrated limited evidence of hard employment or educational outcomes across the cohort. However, when a thematic analysis of the data collected from semi-structured interviews equally important 'soft outcomes' were reported in the majority of those who engaged (Boulton et al., 2019). Positive improvements in attitude, behaviour, and appearance were identified as indicators

of enhanced resilience and self-confidence. As a result, it was recommended that gang-involvement interventions should focus on establishing a trusting relationship between the young person and a credible specialised youth worker.

3. Evaluation Background and Logic Model

The Wolverhampton Violence Reduction Service (WVRS) is part of the larger Catch22 organisation. Catch22 describes itself as a *not-for-profit business with a social mission* and has been operating for over 200 years. Catch22 is comprised of four main hubs to structure their specific services. As part of Catch22's offer, the WVRS falls within the Justice hub and has been operating in the West Midlands of England since 2011. The service started as a pilot for a gang intervention programme with a purpose to reduce the impact of youth crime and gang related behaviour on young people, their families, and the surrounding community through education and support.

Since its inception, the WVRS has grown from providing only youth support and school interventions, into a multi-service group. The WVRS is now comprised of a Prison Resettlement service and a Community Service. This evaluation focuses solely on the Community Service as this comprises the original youth support and school intervention work covered in the first two reports of the overall evaluation (see Appendices A and B). The Community Service's purpose remains the provision of early intervention and prevention to young people who are at risk of harm from gang activities. The Service also supports fully entrenched gang members to identify viable alternatives to the gang lifestyle, violent activities, and antisocial behaviour.

To understand the impact the service has within Wolverhampton and the surrounding communities; an evaluation was requested through Wolverhampton University in 2019. The lead author of this report (Dr Nicole Adams-Quackenbush) took on the evaluation through her social research lab (RIIPL currently located at Newcastle University). The evaluation was originally planned to be conducted over 18 months with a report answering two evaluation questions around evidence-base and impact (see Table 1) and delivered in two phases. Unforeseen circumstances necessitated a longer turn around (i.e., change in management of the WVRS, the COVID global pandemic, and the relocation of the lead evaluator). Instead, the evaluation was conducted over three years and delivered in three phases: Preliminary report, Interim report, and this Final report.

3.1 Preliminary Report

The preliminary report (Appendix A) was conducted to understand the processes and interventions offered by the Community Service (formerly Wolverhampton Violence Reduction Team). The aim was to determine whether the services offered were evidence-based and felicitous to the interventions they replicated. That phase of the evaluation revealed several positive findings regarding the Service's ability to successfully situate itself within Wolverhampton. The Service was regarded as a trusted agency to help address

violence in the area. Local partners, city council, and educational institutions valued the support and the programming offered by the service. The impact on the Wolverhampton community was positive and the service received praise in the local media for their work. The preliminary evaluation also found the Service to be comprised of a cohesive team that was passionate about the work they did. However, several issues with record keeping, referral tracking, and feedback documentation prevented the evaluator from answering the original research question. As a result of the initial report, recommendations were made to streamline referral processes and update data storage software to better track and assess service user progress and case notes.

3.2 Interim Report

The Community Service expanded and improved its offer between 2019 and 2021 to include more work in educational settings and increased training and information sessions for external partners and local organisations. Following some internal initiatives and the recommendations made in the preliminary report, the service also improved its data management system by moving from Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and paper case notes to the Lamplight™ System. Due to the number of changes and improvements to the service, an interim evaluation report was provided to assess the new offers and improved processes that occurred between 2020 and 2021 and to answer the original research question around evidence-base and intervention fidelity (see Appendix B).

The interim evaluation found a partial evidence-base for three of the services offered by the Community Service (i.e., Anger & Emotions programme, Outreach initiative). Intervention fidelity could not be assessed as the programmes were not observed by the evaluator. Four documents and tools used in the delivery of services were also evaluated (Outcome Star to identify strengths and need, Service User Feedback form, Community Client Induction Pack, and the Lamplight system for information management). The use of the Outcome Star was found to be evidence based and used as intended by its creators. The Lamplight system was found to be an extremely valuable addition to the service. The Feedback form and Induction pack were also a vast improvement from previous processes and documents; however, some recommendations were made for further improvements around accessibility and comprehension.

3.3 Final Evaluation Report

The present report is the final phase of the planned evaluation. A logic model was created to guide this final phase of the evaluation (see Table 1). The three specific aims for the final report are:

- To identify whether the needs and strengths of WVRS Service Users are being met and capitalized on through the interventions/ services.
- To determine whether the interventions being delivered maintain therapeutic fidelity.
- To report on the short-, mid-, and long-term influences of the Community Service within Wolverhampton and whether their efforts are contributing to violence reduction and young person wellbeing in their locality.

The final report was originally scheduled for September 2022; however, anticipated changes to the current funding cycle necessitated an earlier report of the findings. This portion of the evaluation expands on the information conveyed in the interim report and includes research-led activities designed to assess the influence of the Community Service's on the community.

3.4 Logic Model

Table 1

Logic model to guide the final phase of the Wolverhampton Violence Reduction Community Service evaluation.

Research Question: Does the WVRS Community Service's activities address a local need, and can its service be evidenced through outcomes and impact?

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term Outcomes	Mid- to Long-term Outcomes
Youth Support Workers	One-to-one Mentoring	Young person and Carer feedback evidencing the individual benefits of the service	Improved young person confidence and self-esteem. Changed thinking around antisocial activities and behaviour	Desisted anti-social behaviour. Reduce or eliminate conflict in community
	Comprehensive case notes	Case notes that keep an accurate record of young person engagement, activities, concerns, and next steps based on situations and identified areas of need.	Ability to track individual cases to assess patterns, identify areas of concern and improvement	Progress tracking and built-in evaluation of service
	Outcome Star completion	Routine completion of the tool periodically with the young person over the course of their involvement with the service	Ability to track and measure change in young person's needs and the maintenance or development of resiliency and strengths in the key areas	Progress tracking and evidence of change and development in the service users
	Support worker feedback upon service completion	Feedback forms completed by young people who have left the programme, ideally with 6 – 12 month follow up.	Dissemination and collection of service user experience for ongoing reflection and improvements to services	Progress tracking and built-in evaluation of service
Community Partners and Stakeholders	Involvement in multi-agency initiatives	Attendance at statutory service meetings. Working towards a common violence reduction goal	Input and information sharing with essential local services	Solidifying community relationships and stronger child protection
	Professional Training	Securing and providing specialist training on gang activity and child exploitation	Establishment of service as experts in the area providing a streamlined offer	More aware and informed professional services
	School-based interventions	Delivering Anger & Emotions programme	Assist schools with changing negative attitudes and behaviour	Reduction in exclusions and school violence

To achieve the research aims, a mixed-methodological approach was taken to quantify the service user information, and to qualify influence through the narratives provided by staff, stakeholders, service users and their primary carer. Within this phase of the evaluation, some processes and training were also observed. Feedback and recommendations are made where appropriate. The findings and recommendations based on the logic model activities can be found in Section 7 of this report.

4. Service Overview

Working directly with at-risk and fully entrenched youth is an integral part of the WVRS operations. The Community service allows the support workers to directly and positively influence the lives and decisions of the young people who need it most. The young people who are referred into the programme are supported, along with their families, to address areas of need and development while focusing on strengths and abilities. The goal of the service is to provide opportunities for the young people to engage in pro-social activities while learning to develop insight into their behaviours. This insight then allows the young person to foresee the potential implications and consequences, which can facilitate behavioural change (Johnson et al., 2014).

The Community Service's work with at-risk and fully gang entrenched young men is extremely relevant to the violence prevention initiatives within Wolverhampton and the West Midlands. The Home Office released its official *Serious Violence Strategy* report in 2018 as a response to the growing problem of serious violence in England and Wales (Home Office, 2018). In 2019, UK's Home Office provided over £3 million in initial funding for violence reduction units (VRUs) to be created within 18 police force areas. The establishment of VRUs was to support a whole systems approach toward serious violence and to address violence as a public health concern through intervention and prevention (Home Office, 2022). Whilst this additional influx of violence reduction resources has assisted with overall violence reduction, the West Midlands and Wolverhampton remain areas of high need for these types of services.

There are approximately 16,700 crimes reported per year in Wolverhampton with violent crime making up 38% of those. This means there are approximately 500 violent crimes reported in Wolverhampton each month, with an estimated 398 of those involving sharp or bladed weapons (UK Police Data, 2022a). The Wolverhampton postcode area is currently ranked 13th highest out of the 99 postcodes across England and Wales with violent crime rates continuing to rise despite a national plateau that has been maintained since 2018 (UK Police Data, 2022b).

The WVRS Community Service has experienced several changes over the three-year evaluation period. There have been significant improvements in their processes, educational materials, and location. In September 2021, the WVRS moved from a small office space on the periphery of Wolverhampton into a larger and more appropriate accommodation within the city center. This space was officially opened by HRH Princess Anne, and was attended by several other local political and policing dignitaries.

The service has also experienced changes in the management structure and personnel over the last three years. The previous service manager left for new opportunities in early 2020 and was replaced by a new manager who was quickly promoted in 2021 to Cluster Manager of Gangs and Violence Reduction Services. In 2021, the service also gained an administrator to assist the Cluster Manager and the WVRS with the daily operations. The most senior support worker was promoted in 2021 to the manager of the Community Support Service and performs these duties in addition to his youth support role.

4.1 Overview of the Youth Support Work

Despite the rapid growth and organizational change, the WVRS Community Service continued to perform the youth work that is central to the Community Service offer. They focused on reducing violence through mentorship, guidance, and training the young people who were referred to them due to some type of involvement or conflict with gangs or violent activity. A traditional youth support worker approach is used by the Community Service to connect with the young people to identify their interests and aspirations, and then capitalise on those through engagement with diversion activities. For example, a young person who is interested in music could be connected to local independent music producers to spend some time in a recording studio, or encouraged to create their own art. These types of activities not only occupy the young person, but often they help develop skills and provide hope for the future. A focus on future planning and a positive outlook is integral for building confidence and facilitating behavioural change (Johnson et al., 2014).

Between 2014 and 2019, the service recorded 324 referrals into the youth support programme with a third of those referrals received between 2017 and 2019. From those referrals, 61% worked with the service ($n = 198$) and the remaining referrals either did not engage with the service or were deemed not suitable for the service and signposted to more appropriate agencies. Most of the young service users were males of mixed race (usually Black and White British) between 11 and 18 years old who exhibited complex needs. Approximately 50% of the total service users within that time frame had been in some type of conflict with the law or were known to police. The average service user was generally 14 years of age living in a single parent home where the father was absent. There were usually other children in the home and the mothers were working long hours to support the family or were in receipt of benefits due to their own mental health and wellbeing challenges. It is unknown what ACEs these young people maybe experiencing as this information is not collected by the Service.

Since 2020, the Community Service has supported an additional 72 young people, all of which were at extremely high-risk of being harmed by a gang or who were fully entrenched in gang lifestyle. The age and ethnic demographics of the service users remained the same with 43% ($n = 31$) conflicting with the law and known to police. Of the 72 accepted referrals, 39% ($n = 28$) were using or had regularly used drugs and 11% ($n = 8$) were diagnosed with a mental health disorder. At the time of referral, 33% ($n = 24$) of the young people were at risk of exclusion from school and a further six (8%) were already excluded. Further needs were

identified within the service users in the form of developmental challenges. That is, seven (7) young people had a diagnosis of ADHD, two (2) were Autistic or Neurodiverse, one (1) had dyslexia, six (6) had an identifiable learning disability, and a further five (5) had some other type of developmental issue. It should be noted that it is possible for a young person to be represented more than once in these figures if they have multiple diagnoses.

4.1.1 One to One Support Process

The young people referred into the Community Service's Youth Support programme come from a variety of organisations throughout Wolverhampton. Since streamlining their service to only accept referrals if there is a real threat of gang involvement, the Community Service now receives referrals from 11 organisations (Schools, Families, MASH Teams, PRUs, Police, Redthread, Social Workers, Strengthening Families, YJS-Walsall, Youth Offending Teams, and Young Person Advisor). In addition to these main referrers other organisations that offer similar services as the WVRS Community Service contact the team for their expertise (i.e., St Giles, Power 2, Trailblazers) this is to ensure the correct support is in place or there has been times where a referral is made to St Giles or Power 2 and they would not accept this due to the community team being the best service for the young person.

To further ensure the young people are being sent to the correct service, the Community Service's referral form requires the referring agency to explain why they believe the young person is involved with or at risk of gang activity. Since most referrals come from the local schools, the Community Service makes it an underpinning priority to keep these young people from being excluded or at least enrolled within some type of educational or training programme.

The referrals are received daily by the Service's administrator who screens them for the appropriate information, seeks additional or missing information, and enters it into the Lamplight system. Sometimes the referrals will be accompanied by a risk assessment for the young person depending on the organisation who made the referral. The information from the risk assessment is transferred to an Excel spreadsheet, which is also stored within the Lamplight system. All referrals are reviewed by the Community Service Manager and depending on the young person's perceived level of risk and number of complex needs, they are divided amongst the Support Workers. This system works to ensure an equal distribution of workload, but to also ensure that no one worker has several young people classified as high-risk and high need. Once the support worker receives a new referral, they reach out to the young person and their families/ guardians to arrange a preliminary meeting.

One of the additions to the Support Work programme was a creation of an induction package. The Community Client induction pack is an information packet given to new Service Users upon referral. It is comprised of 13 pages that cover information about Catch22 and the WVRS, safeguarding, complaints, expectations, consent to services, and contact information. Packages such as this are helpful as a guide through the initial meeting after referral and provide access to information the young person may need during their involvement with the Service. The induction package is a needed and informative tool; however, there are

opportunities for improvements around readability and comprehension (see Interim Report Appendix B).

Once the young person and their families consent to the Youth Support service, an initial meeting is scheduled with the young person to identify areas of strength, need, interest and aspiration. From there, weekly one-to-one sessions are scheduled for diversion activities and/or discussions and check-ins. Records of all activities conducted on a young Person's file are recorded within the Lamplight System. This system also stores any case notes entered by the support workers. One aim of this evaluation was to determine if the case notes tool was being used to its full potential and to assess the quality of the notes to identify strengths, need and progress in the young person. This assessment did not occur, as Cluster Manager was unable to share the anonymized information with the evaluator.

The young people work with their support worker on average for six months and the first month is comprised of four to six one-to-one sessions designed to start building a trusting and supportive relationship with the young person. The one-to-one sessions cover a variety of life skills and progress is assessed through observations and evidence of readiness to change and level of engagement with the Service. In addition to potentially capturing progress or regression within these areas within the case notes, this information is also tracked through a strength-based measurement tool that is completed periodically over the course of the young person's support.

4.1.2 Measuring Strengths and Need: The Outcome Star

The Community Service operates the youth support work framework (mentoring and providing a stable and appropriate role model) based on identifying strengths and need to assist young people. This means the support work focuses on areas in the young person's life that require attention and recognises areas the young person is exhibiting protective properties or resilience. This is in stark contrast to approaches that focus on risk and need, which can tarnish the interactions by focusing only on the negative and imply that there are several problems with the young person (Lerner et al., 2005; Khanna, 2021). The primary tool used in the support work to measure and track need, strengths, and progress is the Outcome Star™.

The Outcome Star™ is a tailored evidence-based tool used to measure and support change when working with people across several sectors. There are over 25 versions that have been developed through consultation with service users, providers, and commissioners. There is a tailored star for children and young people, new mums, parents/ guardians, and individuals with ADHD, to name just a few. The Outcome Stars are designed for use in a one-to-one setting; however, guidance for workers stresses that the creators are not prescriptive about the setting in which they are delivered, or how long the process should take. The Outcome Star™ began as a prototype tool for a homeless charity in London, UK (St Mungos) in 2003. Alongside other organisations, further stars were developed, and several independent researchers have evaluated its use and effectiveness (Good & Lamont, 2018). Studies

demonstrating the Star's psychometric properties as well as its applicability as a key-work tool have also been published (Mackeith, 2014).

The Star encompasses three core values positioned around person-centered and strengths-based approaches: empowerment, collaboration, and integration. Each iteration of the tool uses a series of scales, presented in an accessible and engaging format. The scales address the key outcome areas relevant to the sector for which the version is intended. For example, My Star™, is targeted at children and young people. It addresses physical health, environment and living conditions, safety, relationships, feelings and behaviour, friends, confidence, self-esteem, as well as education and learning. The scales are underpinned by a five-step *Journey of Change* that illustrates the stages individuals go through to make long-term changes in their lives. The Outcome Star, along with the Journey of Change, does not only assess the severity of a problem, but incorporates the individual's relationship with various aspects of their life.

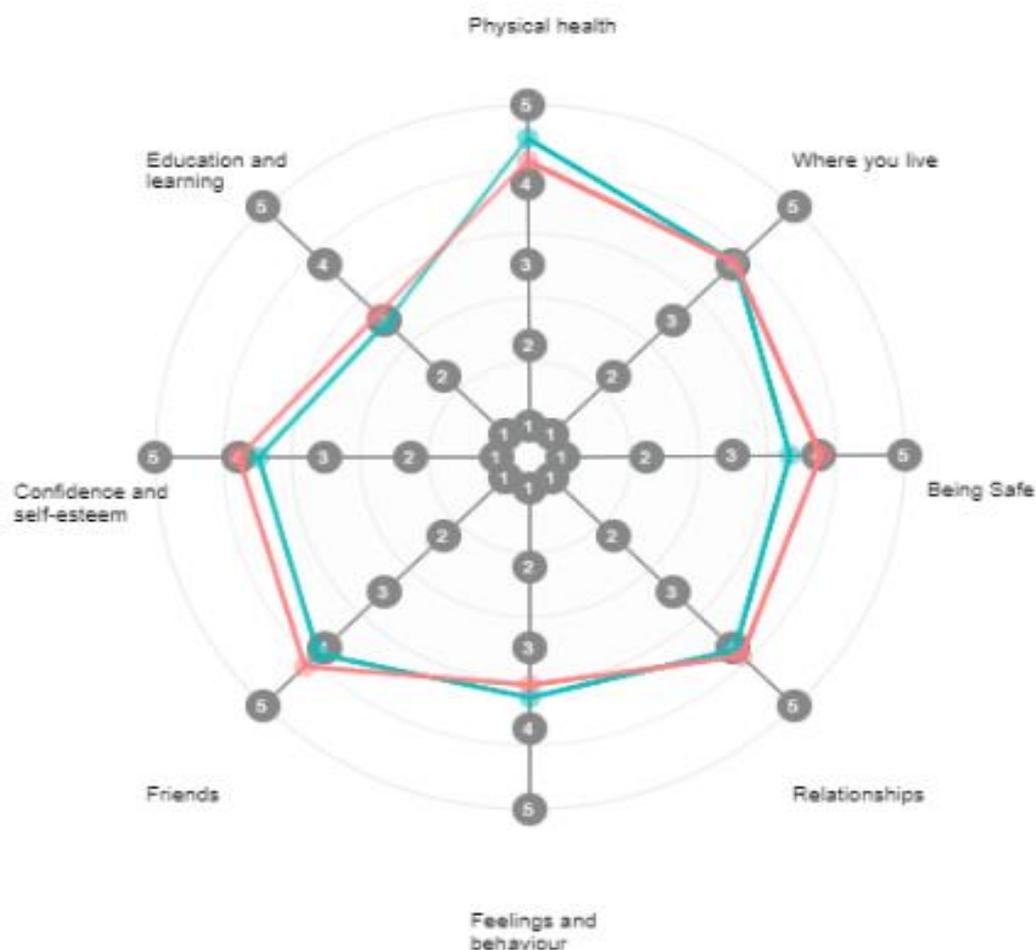
Within the Star, the numbered scales break down topics into manageable stages, allowing for consistent and objective measurement of change. Each area is numbered 1 through 5 and has an assigned colour: red, orange, yellow, green, or blue. Red (1) means things are bad and not changing; orange (2) means things are not going well but it looks like they could change; yellow (3) means the individual and other people are working on it; green (4) means it is mostly okay; and blue (5) means that things are working well. Although 5 is the upper limit of the scale, the guidance emphasises that this does not mean the end of the individual's journey. Continued improvements can be tracked beyond this.

The individual and their support worker will discuss each area for focus and fill in the Star together. This is generally done over the course of the intervention or support programme at different time points to decide what the next steps are to improve each area for the individual. Through this process the Outcome Star™ both measures and supports change in a range of individuals and gives a visual representation of change and progression. Within the WVRS Youth Support service, the Outcome Star data is stored within Lamplight. This allows the Service to assess how individuals are progressing, as well as obtain an overview of all service user scores to determine initial and ongoing needs and strengths (see Figure 1 for an example).

4.1.3 Closing a Young Person's File

When a young person shows evidence progression (e.g., changes in behaviour and discussions) and the support worker believes the young person is ready, steps are taken to close the young person's file. File closure involves a discussion with the young person, as well as other services involved in the individual's case (e.g., social worker, their referrer, school). This communication between services ensures that there have been no new incidents or concerns surrounding the young person that would indicate a need for continued intervention. It also allows for closure with the referrer concerning the issues that led to the young person's referral and informs them of the of the work and progress that has been made.

The closure of a file does not mean the end of contact with the young person. Although there is not a specific follow up procedure after closure, an open line of communication is maintained with social services and parents/guardians. This provides the opportunity for further support to be offered if there is a new or returning problem identified once the young person has left the service. The support offered through this communication can range from giving advice to parents and social services to re-opening a file completely.



Average initial score

Average final score

Figure 1. Collated Outcome Star Data for all active service users of the WVRS Youth Support Service in Q2 (ending June) 2021.

Evaluator's Note

Despite the evidence of need and indications of successes for the WVRS Community Service, a decision was made in April 2022 to no longer fund the service through the West-Midland Police and Crime Commissioners office and that the service funding would not be transferred to the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit. The reasoning surrounding these decisions

was not made clear to the WVRS staff. Efforts are being made by Catch22 management to secure new funding for the Community Service branch of the WVRS; however, it possible that the services as outlined in this report will no longer exist by the time these findings have been made public.

5. Research Methodology

This evaluation took a mixed-methodological approach to ensure informative and robust findings. A combination of observational assessment, semi-structured interviews, and quantitative analysis were used to inform the evaluation so that strengths were identified, and recommendations could be made as needed.

5.1 Participants and Materials

Data was collected for this phase of the evaluation via several different means.

5.1.1 Quantitative Data

Numerical and quantifiable information was extracted from the service's data management system. Prior to January 2020, the data was compiled in several Excel spreadsheets. After January 2020, the WVRS moved their data management system to an online supported platform (Lamplight™). Lamplight is an online data management system for charities to store and manage data. The system is designed around a core set of capabilities and processes; however, it can be customized to the needs of the organisation by setting the fields and modules needed. The Community Service uses the system to track a variety of information related to intake, demographics, and service user data. They also track tasks and activities related to the youth support work for each service user, as well as case notes within the system. This allows for the creation of a variety of reports and ease of information accessibility.

Since January 2020, the Community Service has supported 72 young people. The quantitative data presented in the evaluation report will focus only on these recent referrals. Information on youth support service users engaged with the programme before January 2020 can be found within the preliminary report (Appendix A). No interpretation on referral trends was conducted as there was a reduction in referrals and support activities that occurred between March 2020 – April 2021 due to a global pandemic and subsequent population lockdowns.

5.1.2 Qualitative Data

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff, stakeholders, and service users (N = 11) to obtain in-depth information about the youth support work and other initiatives offered by the service. Each interview was led by a topic guide designed to inform specific aspects of the evaluation.

5.1.2.1 Staff interviews

Staff interviews were conducted at two time points. During the preliminary phase of the evaluation (2019/2020), interviews were conducted with the three ($n=3$) youth support workers and the WVRS manager ($n=1$). Those interviews were conducted to better understand the WVRS, the youth support role, and the young people they supported. In the final phase of the evaluation (2022) three support workers were also interviewed (RB, SD, and SE). Two of the support workers were the same interviewees as the previous interviews, but one worker left the service in 2020 for other opportunities. The new Cluster Manager and the administrator were also interviewed to further understand the processes and organisation of the service.

5.1.2.2 Stakeholder interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two community stakeholders to help assess the Service's relationship with external partners and stakeholders. The interviews also explored the perceived benefits of the Community Service as well as areas for improvement. One stakeholder worked for the Wolverhampton City Council as an Inclusion Support Worker and the other was a Social Worker working with the local Youth Offending Team (YOT).

5.1.2.3 Service user interviews

Two service users (YP1 and YP2) participated in semi-structured interviews to determine their experience with the youth support programme and to determine any benefits or challenges experienced as a direct result of engagement with the programme. The young people who were interviewed presented as bright and engaging young men. They were eager to talk about their experiences with the Service and although they were not asked about their specific situations, they willingly offered information that gave insight to their unique needs. Both young people had identified needs around feelings of anger, a sense of belonging, self-confidence, and family relationships, which was the primary focus of their intervention. No additional personal information was collected on the young people to protect their identities.

5.1.2.4 Parent interviews

Two primary carers (PC1 and PC2) participated in semi-structured interviews with the evaluator. They were the mothers of one current and one past service user. The aim of these interviews was to ascertain any perceived benefits and challenges of the youth support work on their children and the family relationship. Both mothers were eager to speak with the evaluator about their experiences and the perceived influence the service had on their child's behaviour, as well as their relationships with their child.

5.1.3 Training Delivery Assessment

A pilot session for the Community Service's Gang Awareness training was observed on April 13th, 2022. The four-hour training was delivered by two members of the Community Service to three members of GreenSquareAccord (GSA) at the GSA facilities. The three participants were all female Support Workers with GSA who provide support and housing accommodation for those most in need. The training was observed by the evaluator so that feedback and recommendations could be provided.

5.2 Data Analysis

The final phase of the evaluation was primarily driven by qualitative research methods. Several semi-structured interviews were conducted to determine whether there was a local perception that the Community Service was effectively making a difference in terms of violence reduction. These perceptions were collected from the Community Service staff, stakeholders, and service users. All the audio recorded interviews were transcribed and reviewed to get familiar with the content. A deductive approach was taken to identify themes within three main categories: benefits, challenges, and value (see Table 2).

The evaluator also appraised the Gang Awareness training through observational assessment approaches to gauge facilitator performance as well as participant interaction and experience. The materials and content were also assessed for: relevance, flow and building of information, interactivity, comprehensibility, level of information delivery, visual impact, and delivery. In addition to these observations, hardcopies of the presentation slides and notes were also provided to aid the assessment. Feedback was delivered to the facilitators and the cluster manager based on the observations of the evaluator and a summary is provided within this report (see section 6.3).

Over the last three years, several unstructured conversations also took place to gain further understanding of the Service and any challenges experienced at the time. The evaluator followed up via email on these items to determine whether solutions had been found. These outcomes are recorded in section 6.1.2.

6. Findings

The aim of this final phase of the WVRS Community Service evaluation was to assess the programmes offered and to investigate the reach, influence, and potential impact of the service on the local community. The specific research question of interest sought to determine whether the WVRS Community Service activities address a local need, and whether its services can be evidenced through outcomes and impact. When taken together, the overall findings of this evaluation indicate that not only is the WVRS Community Service needed and valued within Wolverhampton, but they also offer a unique skillset that has helped the local schools to combat and prevent violence as well as various types of antisocial behaviour. The Community Service has also positively influenced individual young people and their families to prevent or desist activities that could have wider implications within the city and surrounding areas.

6.1 Youth Support Work Qualitative Findings

A deductive approach was used to thematically analyse semi-structured interviews conducted with service users, parents, stakeholders, and WVRS staff. Three predominant categories (benefits, challenges, and value) were used to identify any overlapping themes that would emerge within each grouping. These themes were then used to assess the perception of the youth support interventions offered by the Community Service. The themes that emerged across all three interview types (staff, stakeholders, and service users) are recorded in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes identified within the semi-structured interviews around three categories chosen to determine the perceived benefits, value, and challenges of the WVRS Community Service Youth Support intervention.

Value	Benefits	Challenges
Expertise	Behavioural change	Funding
Support	Strengthened relationships	Small team vs large need
Trust and Peace of mind	Self-confidence	

6.1.2 Value of the Youth Support Work

The WVRS Community Service operates on an annual budget of approximately £176,000. This figure includes the work they do in educational settings delivering programmes to change antisocial mindsets and behaviour, professional training, and the youth support work. The Community Service does not bill for services (referrals, anger and emotions delivery, advising on multi-agency committees) and partner organisations can use their expertise free of charge.

“... it’s good for [the young people] to have somebody who’s there for them and the fact it’s a voluntary organisation we can refer to makes a difference.”

- NB

The expertise the support workers bring to the area regarding gangs and the knowledge about local young people was not lost of the stakeholders that were interviewed. The stakeholders indicated that the Community Service had an expertise that other services just did not have. They often specifically referred young people to the Service because the cases were too complex for other services to handle.

“For us, it’s best that Catch22 comes in and do their bit because they’re the ones who do it day to day you know. They know what’s going on around the city, they’re clued up around different names [...] and you know, Catch22 is already aware of them.” - AS

“The worker was very skilled in my opinion [...] I think the majority of young people I’ve worked with who have worked with Catch22 very much value the input they’ve had [...] I’ve had some good outcomes from the young people that work with them.” - NB

The youth support workers often fill a role that cannot be met with other services. For example, the stakeholders mentioned that they are often limited in how they can interact with the young person, the rules around disclosure and recordkeeping when speaking with the young person, and even the clothes they are required to wear when working can have a negative effect on their ability to build rapport and trust. When the young people are referred to other statutory services there is often an obligation for that young person to show up and engage or there can be consequences (e.g., breach of legal conditions and licenses, loss of supports, or social benefits implications). Inevitably, this can have adverse effects on what should be a supportive professional relationship. This is not the case with the Community

Service support workers. The youth workers are dressed casually wearing shirts and hoodies with the Catch22 logo emblazoned across them. They can signpost or engage other organisations if they are concerned about safeguarding; however, they are not obligated to report anything disclosed by the young person to the police or social services. This increases trust and the ability for the workers to enact meaningful change in the young person's life.

"Catch22 have more freedom to go and do some of the old-fashioned stuff [...] where you can go and meet in a public place or go and do, kick around a football and then do, you know, that kind of thing [...] Catch22 not only have the intel on what's going on, but they'll also have the time [...] the freedom to make that relationship [...] they're the right people to be doing it and I think that's not always highlighted by different services." – AS

"One of the young people I work with is happy to see his Catch22 worker and he's not so happy to see me." - NB

Through one-to-one support that is tailored to the needs of the young people and their families, the youth support workers often help in ways other organisations cannot. The ability for the Community Service to provide services that cannot be fulfilled within the home, the school, or by other statutory services was also expressed by the parents:

"(SE) put in a lot of footwork with (YP3) to get him to go out of the house. He opened up to her telling her he was frightened – things I never knew that (YP3) wouldn't tell me or anyone and it made me realise (YP3) is very vulnerable." - PC2

PC2 is a mother of a young person (YP3) who was targeted by young youth street gang members that seemed intent on causing him harm. YP3 had been threatened by them and chased with machetes. When the gang started hanging around outside their home and YP3 was too afraid to leave the house, PC2 decided her only choice was to move outside the area. Although leaving Wolverhampton would usually mean that assistance from the Community Service would end, an exception was made by the Community Service team against further isolating the family, and YP3 continued to receive valuable support.

"[SE] managed to get him to go out, which was good because he hadn't been out of the house at all. She came and helped with his homework and his schoolwork because I couldn't do it. It was a really good relationship he formed with her. It was nice to see him smile again." – PC2

This individualized and specific support is seen as an important value of the Community Service's youth support approach. Although this type of support is offered by similar services in the area, the parent notes that the youth support workers had a unique delivery - likely facilitated by a very specific expertise around their knowledge of gangs. This created a sense of trust and peace of mind knowing that the Service was working in the community.

"I think they could turn someone around if they were in a gang. I would say they are really good, you know, they're brilliant with the kids and I wouldn't

worry about anything if they are working with you. You are safe in their hands.” -PC1

6.1.1 Benefits of the Youth Support Work

Three primary themes emerged within the category of benefits. The most prominent benefit appeared to be around behavioural change in the young person. Many of the young people referred into the intervention are at risk of exclusion from school, which is known to increase risk factors around joining or being exploited by gangs and other organised crime groups (Heerde et al., 2014). One mother explained how the support worker helped her son remain in school. He was suspected of gang affiliation by school officials, and subsequently all his undesirable behaviour was seen as evidence of a gang lifestyle (e.g., school uniform untucked, pierced ear, back talk). This caused tension between the young person and his educators that contributed to the young person’s misbehaviour, which in turn put him at risk of exclusion.

“To tell the truth, (RB) kept him in school. If RB didn’t come along, they would have kicked him out [...] he was a godsend to us because he just helped. He helped (YP2) stay in that school. I can’t praise him enough. We need more people like him in our schools.”

YP2 provided insights to the benefits of his experience when working with the Service around behavioural change and improvement on grades. It appears that providing information around the young person’s interests and future aspirations was the needed approach for him to make positive changes in his life:

“Before I was with Catch22 I used to misbehave quite a lot [...] My progress just kept going up, like grades-wise and behaviour-wise when I was with Catch 22 [...] They’ve made me see the bigger picture. They’ve told me about careers like what I want to be after school, what I need to do, how I need to be, what it’s going to be like and that made me the person I am – like striving towards that because if I carried on the way I was, I would have got nowhere near where I want to be.”

For YP1, the benefits of working with the Community Service were potentially lifesaving. His older brother was involved in gang activity and was a past service user of the youth support intervention. Despite any potential positive influences that the Service may have had on YP1’s older brother, YP1 became caught up in the violence and consequences of it:

“Before I saw it [violence] as a more natural thing obviously because I grew up around it and obviously, I saw things, so it felt natural. But as I started to work with (SD) and started to grow older, I’ve realised that it’s not the life that we should be living, and we should be able to walk around the streets freely without looking behind our back and stuff... I just wish everything would stop... it [violence] has happened to me, and obviously I didn’t enjoy it. It [violence] took a couple months of my life away, so really, I don’t wish it on anyone”

Both young people indicated that the benefits around behavioural change would be long lasting. YP2 indicated that he experienced a complete attitudinal shift in his outlook because he learned how to consider the consequences should he take an impulsive action

“In the moment I would do things out of anger, but they’ve taught me like, think about the outcome. What’s going to happen after [...] think about the outcome no matter how much you want to fight someone or say something. There’s been situations where I wanted to say something, and it’s been in the back of my mind what (RB) would say to me”

One of the stakeholders also indicated that the behavioural changes appeared to be long lasting and recounted how it had wider implications within the community:

“... and what I heard from an education worker after the young person had stopped working with [Catch22] actually was that the young person was passing on what he’s learnt by encouraging other young people.” - NB

The families of the young people also experienced benefits as indicated by their carers. One mother (PC1) explained that she could see the shift in her son’s attitude, and it helped their relationship at home. She described trying to get through to her son in the past to explain how his behaviour at school was fueling the gang membership accusations and could be detrimental to his future. These attempts at discussion often resulted on shouting and resentment between her and her son; however, his support worker could have the same conversation with him, and her son would listen. This account was substantiated by her son (YP2):

“My mum... we used to like kind of argue and we’d never see like the bigger picture, never used to talk properly because I used to get angry and then she’d get angry because I was raising my voice or whatever, and then she would try to explain but I just wouldn’t listen because at the time I was angry. But when I saw (RB) he would in other words tell me what my mums been telling me, and I’d listen because we were in a calm situation... I would process it and think, yeah, he’s right [...] We’re [he and his mother] are much closer since Catch22 because of the change in my behaviour.”

This benefit of working with the service is not surprising given the demographic of the service users. These young people are generally referred into the service during the volatile time of adolescent development when they are dealing with physical and hormonal changes while trying to be independent and still dependent on the family relationship. When these normal developmental milestones occur in a young boy who has no reliable male role model and must contend with the effects of past or continued adversity, it can exacerbate the behaviour into something detrimental (Raby & Jones, 2016; Gray et al., 2021). Having trusted adult to talk through issues is extremely beneficial for these young people. However, it is crucial that the adult is not in an authoritative or disciplinary position. This is the ethos at the center of traditional youth support work (Butts et al., 2010).

“I think the way he [RB] speaks to kids because he knows them – he knows how to speak to them on their level. He [RB] talks to both parent and child trying to make each other understand the other[...] even the teachers started listening because I think (YP2)’s behaviour changed when (RB) came along. It was good the way (RB) was speaking to him. It was good because they understood each other.” – PC1

The support work can also have direct positive benefits to the carers. The support workers sometimes travel to the homes of the young people they support, which allows them to assess living conditions, any safeguarding concerns, and work with willing parents to assess the progress of the young person. PC2 spoke about feeling isolated since moving out of Wolverhampton where she had to leave her social and statutory supports behind. This was very difficult for her, because she felt like the family had fell through the cracks. She felt that no one cared about her, or her children, and her perception was that no one - not even the local police – were willing to assist her prior to the move. Any social or mental health supports she and her children received were also halted after the move.

“I got support myself. I’m not being rude, but sometimes I thought I was cracking up [...] I think without [SE] - and that’s my hand on my heart - I would have gone into a dark, dark place. ‘Cause I’m an ex-drug addict and I lost all my support, and I was feeling very isolated. It was like, it was nice to see someone even if it was every two weeks; it was nice to lift off. The only people who stuck by us was [Catch22]”

The final theme that emerged within the benefits category is a sense of self-confidence. This could be seen as subsection of behavioural change; however, it goes beyond that. Through engagement with the support workers, the young people began to see themselves differently and that translated into future aspirations and hope because they now had a sense of self-worth. YP1 began to see himself as a person of value and potential, which had never occurred to him before. He also began to see others in the same light – as people with hopes and potential and a realisation that not everyone was out to get him. This has allowed him to be open with people in general and to effectively express himself better. He went on to describe changes in his self-confidence and ability to positively lead people:

“I now feel the need to help and basically do my part. I’ve learnt how to make better decisions for myself. I feel more hopeful in myself. It’s [the Service] influenced me to really, just as I said, open up and think about all the things I have in my life – the good and the bad, and to talk about them. I’d never say before that I was the type of guy to like even be in a position to lead [...] but I think now, I would definitely like put myself out there and do it.”

YP2 commented that his support worker was the only person to care about what he thought and what he wanted in life. He explained that he had a bleak outlook on the future and often felt quite low, which then translated into acting out and misbehaving, which in turn led to further low feelings and acting out. But since working with his support worker, that has all changed and he has seen tangible improvements in his grades and outlook on life.

“From going from exclusions and low grades and everything but after Catch22 they stopped me seeing (RB) because there’s been such an improvement that I don’t need him to be there because he’s done his job with me, and I’ve been resilient. [RB] taught me that I need to make a change and he’s helped me through that change.”

YP1 also mentioned that his support worker taught him how to be more open with his feelings instead of acting out. The ability to be open and talk to his support worker was a positive change for him and he began to see himself and his community from a more positive perspective.

“There have been times when I’ve been like a bit moody...and I’ve talked to (SD) about it, and he’s encouraged me to like talk about it. I just found out one of the guys I know from school also is doing Catch22 so now we have that in common to talk about it and stuff. My brother used to do it, and sometimes he does ask me if I’ve gone with (SD) [...] so there’s another talking area for me and my brother. I’ve always really liked my community, but now I think the whole community just gets better because of them [Catch 22].”

6.1.3 Challenges associated with Youth Support Work

When examples of challenges working with the Community Service were sought within the interviews, nothing emerged from the service users or stakeholders. All references to the Community Service were overwhelmingly positive. However, some overall challenges of the nature of the work emerged.

The issue of funding insecurity was mentioned by all the adult interviewees (carers, stakeholders, and staff). Violence reduction interventions run by charities and non-for profits such as the WVRS often rely on the support of government funding that is renewed on a yearly basis (e.g., Home Office violence reduction funding or the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner). This means that the non-profits and charities must spend a significant time within that funding cycle justifying their impact and writing proposals to secure more funding for the next cycle. This activity detracts from the support work and prevents the security needed to grow and develop the intervention. It also causes an insecurity in the community and with the young people as they never know when the service could be discontinued.

“But we all know how these things work. The best programmes just disappear because the government doesn’t really care about us [...] they just want numbers to show that they did a good job, or threw money at that problem, or that violence is down [...] These issues are more complicated than that!” – PC1

Because of the scarcity of available funding, many organisations - like the WVRS Community Service - are forced to keep their workforces small to make the service more feasible and attractive to potential funders, which can directly influence the reach and impact they have with their service delivery. This theme came up in the staff and stakeholder interviews, with the staff recognizing they could do more with more resources and longer-term funding, but

they also acknowledged that they pour everything they have into the support work because they are passionate about what they do.

“We’re working way above what we should be working, but I mean, it’s a passion that you have for the job and you want to help, so you just get on with it.” - RB

“We’re not taking on board as many referrals so it means that our impact on the community is going to be less so there will be a knock-on effect for everything [...] So, I’d say if we really want to make a bigger impact then yeah we will need another member of staff.” – SB

“The more staff they have, the more young people they could help” – AS

The small team who services a big need in Wolverhampton also has the issue of evidencing tangible impact for prospective funding providers. It is very difficult to quantify the impact of a service that helps people and their communities in such an individualized manner. Moreover, when several initiatives or interventions are being funded or implemented at once, it becomes nearly impossible to tease apart where the largest contribution to measurable change originated.

“... about levels of deprivation and increasing cuts to services it’s kinda like it’s a bigger social problem; it’s a bigger social context [...] from the perception of Catch22, I think it’s hard for one organisation to be able to do that [evidence their impact on direct violence reduction]. I think it depends very much on kind of government policy and then how that filters out.” – NB

While it is understandable that funders require evidence of success, organisations such as the WVRS are often expected to quantify this evidence. This is not an easy task when the evidence exists in the stories and narratives of the communities these services operate within. The ripple effect of turning even a few youths away from violence or helping them to remain in education cannot be quantified in the short term. These organisations can offer numbers around case load (reach) and the schools they work with can help evidence a reduction in violent acts (specific impact), but profound overall impact can only be evidenced if proper and secure funding is in place and the key metrics are tracked longitudinally.

6.2 Professional Training Sessions

The WVRS Community Service also supports the wider community through the provision of school intervention services and offering professional training to local organisations. The Catch22 gang support services’ expertise about gang activity is valuable to other professional and statutory services on a local, regional, and national level. The factors around violent behaviour is complex and thus needs a specialised group of experts to assist with initiatives to reduce the impact of those activities on communities and young people.

6.2.1 Gang Awareness Training

The WVRS has created several types of educational and community awareness materials through their parent organisation, Catch22. One of their more popular handbooks centers

around awareness and recognizing the signs of gang involvement, criminal activity, child exploitation, knife crime and violence. The Community Service have expanded the information contained in the handbook to create workshops and information sessions that have been offered to schools, organised events, and online (e.g., Perceptions vs Reality and Social Media Awareness training). Most recently, the Community Service has developed a Gang Awareness Training that contains material also found in the handbook but expands on the information and education around the topic.

The WVRS Community Services' experience and expertise on gang activity and the impact on the community puts them in a unique position within the West Midlands to educate practitioners and other professional service providers. The purpose of the Gang Awareness training is to aid professionals in understanding and identifying the factors that may lead a young person to become involved in gang activities or gang lifestyle. Additionally, it contains information around the link between ACEs, vulnerabilities, and potential exploitation. The session also offers strategies for professionals to offer strategies to safeguard young people and manage risks through intervention and prevention.

The training was delivered and facilitated by two members of the Community Service. It should be noted that this was a pilot delivery of the training and the first time either facilitator had presented the material in this format. The training was observed and assessed across six metrics. Each metric was scored on a four-item scale: Poor (needs significant improvements), Good (some improvements needed), Excellent (no improvements required). Specific feedback and recommendations were provided to the facilitators and the cluster manager after the session. A summary of that feedback and associated recommendation are provided in this report.

6.2.1.1 Training and Topic Relevance

The training and topic were within the remit of the Community Service and within the knowledge and expertise of the facilitators. They were also relevant to the trainee's and their organisations as they work with vulnerable young people. The participants all provided anecdotal confirmation of behaviour they have witnessed that reflected some of the indicators of young people being exploited by gangs or seeing evidence of gang activity in the area. Overall score = Excellent.

6.2.1.2 Flow and Scaffolding of Information

The presentation and materials were presented in a logical order; however, there was a *stream of consciousness* feel to how the information flowed. Recommendations were made to move some of the information around to better capture the audience's attention and to apply pedagogical techniques around scaffolding information. By presenting the information in a slightly different manner, the facilitators would be able to prepare the participants to comprehend new information more easily, and to consolidate some of the information to improve time management around delivery. Overall score = Good

6.2.1.3 Comprehensibility and Level of Delivery

All information was easily understood and delivered on a level appropriate for all levels of experience and understanding around the topic. Those with no understanding of the impacts of gangs on the community would be sufficiently educated to understand the complexities and recognise signs of exploitation or gang involvement. Those participants with a high level of knowledge on the topic would find the training interesting and engaging. There was ample opportunity for knowledge exchange through activities and discussion. Overall score = Excellent.

6.2.1.4 Interactivity

There was a good balance between delivering the content and facilitating discussion with the attendees. The amount of discussion was appropriately balanced with the content and enhanced the learning experience for the participants. Towards the end of the training session, some discussions were cut short due to time constraints; however, this is addressed in section 6.2.1.6. Overall score = Excellent.

6.2.1.5 Visual Impact

The slides were professionally constructed and interesting view. They were not cluttered and the negative space on each slide was balanced with visual content. Some slides could be enhanced with less textual information (i.e., only the main points or key take aways presented) and with more visual content (e.g., figures, bullet points, graphs, photos). Overall score = Excellent

6.2.1.6 Professional Delivery and Time Management

The presenters were professional and friendly and set a comfortable tone with humour and good-natured banter. There was a tendency to read the information on the slides as opposed to using the information as talking points. This may be improved by reducing the text so participants can easily read or understand the information while it is being explained by the facilitator. The recommendations around scaffolding the training regarding the delivery and information can assist with streamlining the information and freeing up room for meaningful discussion without rushing through content at the end. Recommendations were also made on timings for the content. Overall score = Good.

Overall, each metric for the Gang Awareness Training was scored at a Good or Excellent rating. The recommendations were made to improve or optimise the delivery and the timings around the session. The information provided is accurate, relevant, evidenced, and interesting. Even in the pilot form, the training achieved its aims and objectives in terms of understanding gang activities and increasing prevention and response through education.

6.2.2 Anger and Emotions Training

Since its inception in Wolverhampton, the Community Service has done a lot of work with the local area schools to identify and mitigate concerns that have the potential to grow into larger problems, such as violent outbursts, disruptive behaviour, and school exclusions. Their most popular and effective intervention with schools is the Anger and Emotions programme that aims to address difficulties in coping with negative emotions and to promote positive behavioural change in young people. This programme is sometimes requested and delivered

outside of school settings (e.g., Pupil Referral Units, Care Homes), but it is mostly requested in traditional education settings. The participants are identified by educational staff and sessions are delivered within the educational setting in groups of four to eight individuals over six 40-minute sessions. Each session contains the same three aims: 1) Introduce key themes, 2) build group rapport, and 3) break down barriers and introduce a different key focus. Each session involves group discussions and exercises, as well as small group and individual exercises built around the key focus for the session:

- Session 1 – addressing self-identity and self-esteem
- Session 2 – managing anger
- Session 3 – identifying ‘good’ and ‘bad’ behaviour
- Session 4 – perceived effects of behaviour on others
- Session 5 – the effects of anger on the body
- Session 6 – consequences of behaviour

The sessions are designed to increase awareness around the young person’s angry feelings and to identify supports and strategies the young person can use to help control their anger. The rationale behind this programme is to provide young people with the opportunity to work with each other to develop prosocial relationships built on healthy boundaries and trust. The sessions are comprised of four to eight young people, with efforts made to adjust the content to the needs and ages of the cohort.

The young people who participate are referred to the programme by school officials and pastoral teams. The young people are often at risk of exclusion due to behavioural issues likely due to the normal challenges of adolescence that are exacerbated by adversity experienced within the home, the school, or the wider community. The aims and objectives for the programme are assessed through a short self-report questionnaire completed by the young person pre and post intervention. Once all sessions have been delivered, young people also complete a Participant Feedback Form, and the programme facilitator completes a Post Programme report.

The evaluator was unable to assess the delivery or intervention fidelity of this programme because direct observation of delivery could not be achieved. Therefore, it is recommended that evaluation is built into the feedback and follow-up process to better assess the aims and outcomes. The current feedback and self-assessment forms could benefit from improvements to minimise participants biased responding (e.g., reporting on experiences in the final session as opposed to considering the course holistically) and to improve validity of the feedback (e.g., the form captures and measures the appropriate key indicators, assesses learning outcomes, and measures change through follow-up). See Appendix B for more detail on the recommendations for this specific intervention.

7. Indicators of Success and Recommendations

The overarching aim of this evaluation was to determine whether the activities conducted by the WVRS Community Service addressed a local need, and whether impact of these activities could be evidenced. As stated earlier in this report, drawing definitive conclusions around one intervention's ability to create meaningful impact in an area is extremely difficult. This difficulty is compounded when a service or intervention is not set up with evaluation built-in or if key performance indicators of change and impact are not explicitly developed from the outset. Despite these difficulties, this evaluation has found evidence of need, and emerging evidence of potential impact.

7.1 Unique Impact and Contribution of WVRS Community Service

There are several interventions occurring in and around Wolverhampton that are intended to prevent, address, and respond to the high levels of youth violence in the area. These interventions and services generally work together to exchange knowledge and information; however, it is clear the WVRS fulfils a unique need in the region. The Service works to prevent violence through training and education of professionals, practitioners, and young people. The individual work they do with young people referred into the Service fulfils a preventative role through behaviour and attitude change. The Service also addresses violence through the support work they do with the individual young people and their families. They respond to violence by continuing to develop and grow their service to meet the complex and changing needs of the people and the community.

Community stakeholders and several similar services recognise the high-level of knowledge and expertise of the Community Service Team. These organisations either work almost exclusively with the team (e.g., schools) or they refer their most complex cases to them (e.g., other youth support services). This demonstrates that the WVRS is best suited to deliver specific services and that there is an underlying trust towards the Service from those who work with and refer into the programmes. Whilst there is always room for development and improvement, the few recommendations suggested within this report reflect the top-quality services currently provided. Most of the recommendations concern ensuring that evaluation is embedded into their activities and making certain that feedback and follow-up are captured on valid forms that contain measurable objectives and key performance indicators. Below are some specific highlights and recommendations for each main aspect of the WVRS Community Service. These are also summarised and aligned with the evaluation logic model in Table 3.

7.2 Highlights of the Youth Support Work & Recommendations

There was good anecdotal evidence for the influence and impact of the individual youth support work. Those who provided information for this aspect of the evaluation were overwhelmingly positive about the Service and the capabilities of the youth support workers. The semi-structured interviews provided clear anecdotal evidence around the benefits and value of the service for the young people, their families, and some of the stakeholders/community partners that work with the Community Service team.

Although the sample was small for these interviews, the participants provided examples of how the youth support intervention positively changes the behaviour and outlook of the young people they work with. There is a high likelihood that the youth support intervention does not have a positive effect or long-lasting outcome on all the young people who are referred into the service. There are several factors that can interfere with the potential for success (e.g., readiness to change and individual circumstances); however, no intervention can be expected to have a perfect success rate. Despite this, there are mechanisms the WVRS Community Service team can put into place to get a better sense of their impact and reach in the community.

The recommendations for the youth support work can be summarised as a need to develop processes for follow-up. To improve the reach of the support work, it is recommended that young people who leave the service early or complete the intervention are periodically contacted for follow-up and additional feedback. It is possible that the young people will experience new challenges that could lead to unexplored difficulties that they may not have the experience or knowledge to navigate on their own. A follow-up can help the team to identify these challenges and either signpost the young person to an appropriate service, or trends in difficulties can alert them to additional intervention needs.

By following up with the young people and their families as well as their referrers can also give the Service a sense of longitudinal impact. For example, a young person at risk of exclusion and being groomed by a local gang may show short-term progress but showing long-term educational attainment and continued desistance from antisocial activities and people is evidence of real impact. These metrics can be easily captured on appropriate feedback and follow-up documentation. The Lamplight system also has the capabilities to track and provide simple analysis of the longitudinal trends. However, stability in the service (e.g., ability to plan with stable funding) is a necessity for such an endeavour.

Box 1. Youth Support Recommendations

1. Create a follow-up procedure for service users who leave or complete the one-to-one mentoring intervention to determine longitudinal influence and impact.
2. Secure a funding stream that allows for the continuance of the youth support work and the ability to dedicate resources to embedding evaluation of impact into the service delivery.

7.3 Highlights of the Educational Initiatives & Recommendations

Although there is some overlap in training and information around child exploitation and gangs with similar services, the Community Service team have a plethora of experience and knowledge on the subject, and they are well suited to continue with such initiatives and to develop additional offers within this topic. The Community team is also the best organisation to deliver the educational interventions within the local schools and they are currently the only organisation providing this service.

Despite the evidence that the Anger and Emotions workshops are partially evidence-based and there is anecdotal evidence of reduced violence in the schools, it is important that the Service strives to capture this evidence through tangible measures and outcomes. Thus, the recommendations for this programme are to have it individually evaluated for therapeutic fidelity and tracked to assess outcomes around behaviour change and violence reduction. Ongoing evaluation of that programme should also be embedded into the service to help the team assess who the programme works for and identify any areas needed for improvement to make it more effective. It would also be helpful to create a follow-up process for past attendees to provide feedback to the team so their progress and adherence to the principles of the programme can be assessed. This would also enable the school and the Community team to identify additional areas of concern or success for the young people. In turn, these can be recorded within the Lamplight system to create additional evidence of impact.

The Gang Awareness training is a great addition to the Community Service offer. The team is well suited to deliver it locally and within the wider region should resources allow. Such a training would be beneficial to local educators and universities, as well as those who work in charities and statutory services. As mentioned, the training is appropriate for a diverse audience with varied experience with gangs and child exploitation/ victimisation. Some recommendations have already been provided to the team around ways to deliver it in a more streamlined fashion without sacrificing content or experience. The only additional recommendation would be around follow-up to determine effectiveness of the training. For example, participants could be contacted at six- and 12-months post-training to collect information around how they are using the information and whether they think it has enhanced their practices and assisted their service users.

Box 2. Educational Initiatives Recommendations

1. Create a follow-up process for schools and the young people who complete the Anger and Emotions programme to determine longitudinal influence and impact.
2. Have the Anger and Emotions programme independently evaluated and assessed.
3. Apply the recommendations already provided to improve the delivery of the Gang Awareness Training
4. Create a follow-up process for participants of the Gang Awareness training to determine longitudinal influence on professional practice and to demonstrate impact through partner services and organisations.

7.3 Limitations of the Evaluation and Future Directions

There were a variety of factors that contributed to this evaluation experiencing some limitations and methodological considerations. Most notably, there were situational factors around organizational change for the service and the demands of academic workload for the evaluator that influenced the timeframes of the evaluation. These were exacerbated by the

onset of a global pandemic and national lockdowns that impeded the travel and interaction of individuals as well as the way services were delivered. The final phase of the evaluation was always intended to be research led, and this required the evaluator being able to observe training delivery, to meet with the Community Service team at their site, and to interview several people. Whilst all semi-structured interviews with service users, parents, and stakeholders were conducted remotely, some interviews with parents and young people were facilitated by the Community Service team who provided the technology needed for the interview to take place. This would have been extremely difficult during the pandemic, and in some cases impossible.

Table 3

Findings and recommendations for each activity assessed over the course of the WVRS Community Service evaluation

Research Question: Does the WVRS Community Service activities address a local need, and can its service be evidenced through outcomes and impact?			
Inputs	Activities	Findings	Recommendations
Youth Support Workers	One-to-one Mentoring	Some evidence of improved confidence and outlook. Good anecdotal evidence of changed thinking around antisocial activities	Develop tools to measure and track longitudinal desisted antisocial behaviour.
	Comprehensive case notes	Inconclusive regarding quality. Using appropriate system to store and compile case information	Incorporate an ACEs measure into the tool kit.
	Outcome Star completion	Used appropriately Change in need and strengths are tracked and reported	Ensure measure is completed consistently throughout the support period.
	Support worker feedback upon service completion	Feedback forms completed by young people who have left the programme. How information is used remains unclear.	Incorporate a follow-up or check in with service users to assess the longer-term influence of the support.
	Community Partners and Stakeholders	Involvement in multi-agency initiatives	Input and information sharing with essential local services. Valued and respected service within the community
Professional Training		Developing and providing specialist training on gang activity and child exploitation	Create a follow-up process to measure impact
School-based interventions		Popular and valued within the educational community. Anecdotal evidence of behaviour change	Develop measures to track tangible impact and violence reduction in the schools

A methodological limitation within this portion of the evaluation concerns the small sample size within the qualitative analysis. Whilst there was a rich narrative provided by all

participants, this research would have benefitted from three to six participants for each type of interviewee (e.g., young person, parents, stakeholders). By having such a sample size, the existing themes could have been strengthened by having more corroboration. Moreover, the likelihood of identifying additional themes increases.

The evaluation initially included an assessment of the case notes to see if they were being recorded in a way that clearly conveyed the needed information and to assess the quality of information provided. The anonymised case notes were received for the period of 2019 – 2020; however, when the up-to-date notes were requested, the Service was instructed they could not be shared by the parent organisation (Catch22). Considering the significant changes accrued in the Service since 2020, it was decided by the evaluator to remove this activity from the overall evaluation.

Another activity was also removed from the final evaluation. The WVRS Community Service is also involved in an initiative with several statutory services and local organisations to prevent, address, and monitor suspected or known cases of child exploitation. This is largely an information sharing venture where multiple agencies can discuss specific cases and events to gain better understanding of the issues. Preliminary information indicated that being involved in these activities is beneficial to the Service and the affiliated partner organisations. However, interviews with members of this organisation could not be arranged in time for this report and the evaluator decided to remove this activity.

8. Conclusions

The WVRS Community Service has seen significant growth and demonstrated stability despite being subjected to a funding environment that made it difficult to plan for future initiatives or to spend the time needed to embed evaluation into the Service. Since 2019, the Service has demonstrated a resilience and commitment to continue to service the community and young people of Wolverhampton. They are a dedicated team of professional that offers a strength-based and evidence-based intervention that aims to prevent, address, and respond to factors that contribute to violence in the region. Although there is opportunity to improve how they track and measure their contribution to violence reduction, it is clear they are experts in helping young people change and do better for themselves. These young people are the future of Wolverhampton and many of them require this support.

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10. Appendices

Appendix A – Phase One Report

OVERVIEW

Strategic Highlights

Catch 22 Wolverhampton Violence Reduction Team has situated itself as an agency trusted to assist with youth violence in the area. Initial reports indicate that local partners, city council, and educational institutions value the supports and programming offered by the Violence Reduction Team.

Impact Highlights

The impact on the local community appears positive and they have been publicly praised in the local media. There are opportunities to further the impact by increasing retention rates in the One-to-One programme.

Operating Highlights

The staff are a cohesive group that have found a rhythm that works for them. There are ways to streamline processes and improve the flow and storage of data and information.

Looking Ahead

This is a preliminary report. A complete evaluation of the processes and impact is planned for 2020. Once completed, and full report will be made available.

INTRODUCTION

Wolverhampton Violence Reduction Team

The Catch 22 Wolverhampton Violence Reduction Team (WVRT) has been operating since 2011. The purpose of the WVRT is to reduce the impact of youth crime and gang related behaviour on young people, their families, and the surrounding community. The WVRT strives to perform this service through evidence-based best practices.

This report is a small part of a larger evaluation being conducted on the WVRT. The aim of the evaluation is to provide evidence of best practices and make recommendations for further improvements. This is also in line with initiatives undertaken with the West

Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner's office to ensure they are funding programmes that operate on the basis of research and therapeutic intervention.

The initial purpose of this preliminary report was to give insight to any impact the WVRT may have in reducing local youth violence and gang activity. We sought to quantify the work of the WVRT in relation to costs to local law enforcement (West Midlands Police) and health organisations (NHS). However, extensive research has revealed that the police agencies and NHS do not keep records for specific costs for investigating and dealing with incidents involving severe youth and gang violence. This makes it difficult to quantify the work of WVRT in terms of savings or economic costs to the police and NHS. Therefore, this report will focus on some aspects of operations for the WVRT one-to-one support service, as well as impressions of impact thus far.

Impact can also be assessed in terms of youth recidivism, youth success stories, community perception, and contribution to the regional initiatives around knife crime and gang involvement. This report will touch on those items; however, the final report will provide a more complete understanding of the WVRT's impact and reach in the local community and the region.

"My Catch22 support worker came to my school to speak to the teachers about some of the problems I was having. Thanks to him I then managed to get the support I needed to stay in school and do well. He also recognised that the reason I was kicking off was because I worried about my mom being ill. He was the only one that listened to me, without judging me"- WVRT Service User

ONE-TO-ONE SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Working directly with at-risk and fully entrenched youth is an integral part of the WVRT operations. This programme allows the support workers to directly and positively influence the lives and decisions of the young people who need it most.

Referrals

Since 2014, the WVRT have recorded 324 referrals to the One-to-One support programme. The most notable increase occurred over the last three years (2017 – 2019), with 294 young people being referred during this period. In 2019, WVRT obtained 113 referrals for one-to-

one support, which is a testament to their growing positive reputation in Wolverhampton (see Figure 1). It was also noted that many agencies will call on the WVRT to deal with youth that other agencies refuse to handle. This also speaks to the value of the WVRT to more challenging young people and their communities.

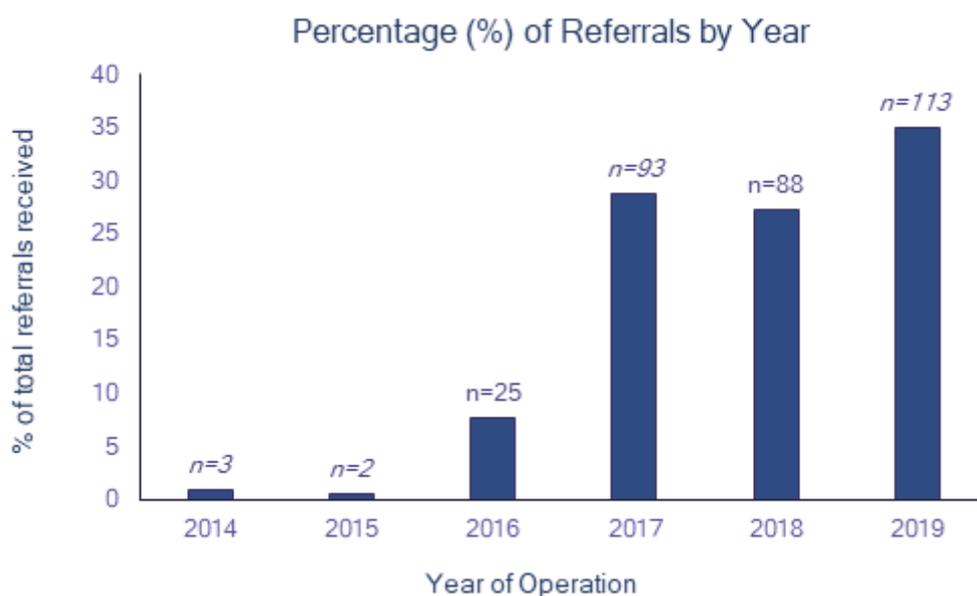


Figure 1. Number of referrals represented by percentage received each year. Actual number of referrals received is recorded at the top of each bar ($n=x$).

The WVRT receives referrals from 25 agencies in Wolverhampton that can be categorised into eight types of organisations: law enforcement, educational, social services, employment agencies, community/ family supports, other non-government agencies, and family. Over the last four years, most referrals came from law enforcement (30%) and community/ family support agencies (e.g., Strengthening Families; 22.5%). These are closely followed by referrals from educational institutions (20%) and social services (18%).

It should be noted that the number of referrals originating from the legal system has dropped significantly since 2017 and the number of referrals from educational sources has steadily increased (Table 1). There are several factors that may have contributed to the decreasing trend with law enforcement referrals (e.g., evidence of positive impact, shifting focus of law enforcement, competing resources) and the increase in educational referrals

(e.g., positive reputation with schools, shifting needs of young people). These trends will be investigated more in-depth with the final evaluation.

Table 1

Organisations that have referred clients to WVRT and percentage (%) of those referrals by year.

ORGANISATION	2016 (N=25)	2017 (N=93)	2018 (N=88)	2019 (N=113)
WOLVERHAMPTON POLICE	20	33	14	3
PROBATION SERVICES	4	-	-	-
YOUTH OFFENDING TEAM (YOT)	48	14	9	9
EDUCATIONAL/ SCHOOL	4	17	15	27
SOCIAL SERVICES	16	15	14	24
STRENGTHENING FAMILIES	-	11	31	24
PARENT/ CARER/ FAMILY	4	2	2	3
LAC TRANSITION TEAM	-	1	3	-
SELF-REFERRAL	-	-	1	-
OTHER *	4	6	11	11

* Note: Organisations included with 'Other' contributed only one or two referrals at one time point only.

The Young People

Overall Referral Demographics

The primary reason for referrals was to provide intervention for youth at-risk of gang involvement (68.8%) or who were already fully entrenched in gang activity (18.8%). The most common secondary reason for referring to the WVRT indicated the young person was being threatened by a gang or gang member (19.8%).

The population of youths between 11 and 18 years old in Wolverhampton is approximately 24,349 people (Official National Statistics, 2018) with 7% of that population reported as Black/African ethnicity and 5% reported as mixed heritage. The young people referred to the WVRT are mainly Male (90.7%) of Black/African decent (20.7%) or mixed heritage

(19.4%). Those reported as having multiple ethnicities were mostly of Black/African and White mixed heritage (84%). However, the actual number of youths who identify as Black or mixed race could be much higher. There were multiple referrals with ethnicity marked as 'Unknown' by the referring organisation (34.3%).

The young people are referred from a variety of agencies and come with diverse and often complex needs. Most referrals are reported as enrolled in school (69.4%) with a significantly smaller number not in education, employment, or training (12%). Some of the young people referred have disabilities (11%), most of which are related to mental health (45.7%) and special education needs (15.5%). Again, the number of youths with special needs may be higher as many referrals are received with this information listed by the referring organisation as disability unknown or unstated (54.7%) and special education unknown or not stated (27.3%).

There is no significant difference between the number of young people referred who had experience in with the criminal legal system (34.3%) and those who have not (32.7%). A much smaller number have experience with or have been referred from the Care System (10.5%). However, these numbers could be different as 22% of the referring organisations indicated unknown experience for these demographic items.

PATHWAYS TO IMPACT

Assessing impact is important for services such as the WVRT because it can be used as a measure of effectiveness and of the therapeutic or anti-therapeutic outcomes. This is especially important for organisations that rely on funding from external sources. The main objective of this preliminary report was to assess the effect and influence the WVRT has on the young people it serves, their families, and the local community. Impact can also be assessed by evaluating the direct or indirect influence of the WVRT on other local agencies and authorities.

Impact on Referred Youth

Open Cases

As of December 31st, 2019, there were 74 open referrals spread across three WVRT Youth Support Workers. There are 72 young males and 2 young females currently using the services of the WVRT between the ages of 6 and 18 ($M_{age} = 13.73$, $SD = 2.66$). Of these youth 27% were identified as Black/ African heritage; however, the majority (47.3%) were listed as unknown ethnicity by the referring organisation.

Most of the young people with open cases are enrolled in school (73%). A smaller number were identified as not enrolled in education, training, or employment (16%). At referral, 20% of these cases were identified as having a disability, with the majority reported as having issues with mental health. This number is most likely higher as the youth support workers have reported suspecting serious mental health concerns once they start working with the young person. Most of these mental health concerns originate in adverse childhood experiences in the home; however, some are a result of traumatic violent events the youth has experienced or witnessed. Unfortunately, the lack of local mental health resources leaves many of these young people undiagnosed and untreated.

The complexity of the young person's needs is also evidenced by the length of time their case remains open and active. The young people spend an average of 8.5 months in the One-to-One Support programme; however, sometimes a young person requires a longer tenure and more support. For example, one young person spent over six years in the programme (case now closed), and a currently active case has been open for almost three years. It is possible that these young people remained open for so long due to time spent incarcerated and were not actively engaged with the WVRT for the entire time. The reasons for lengthy tenure will be investigated further in the larger evaluation.

Closed Cases

Between 2014 and 2019 there were 250 closed cases. There are a variety of reasons young people stop working with the WVRT (see Figure 2); however, only one is an indicator of success. Files coded with 'ready to move on' as a closure reason indicates the young person has received all the needed support from the WVRT and are no longer at risk (24.8%). Whilst this number may seem low, there are factors completely outside of the control of the WVRT that can force a case to close. For example, the young person may have

moved out of the serviced area (14%) or parents withdrew consent (10%). It is possible that these young people could have successfully moved on had they not been relocated or withdrawn.

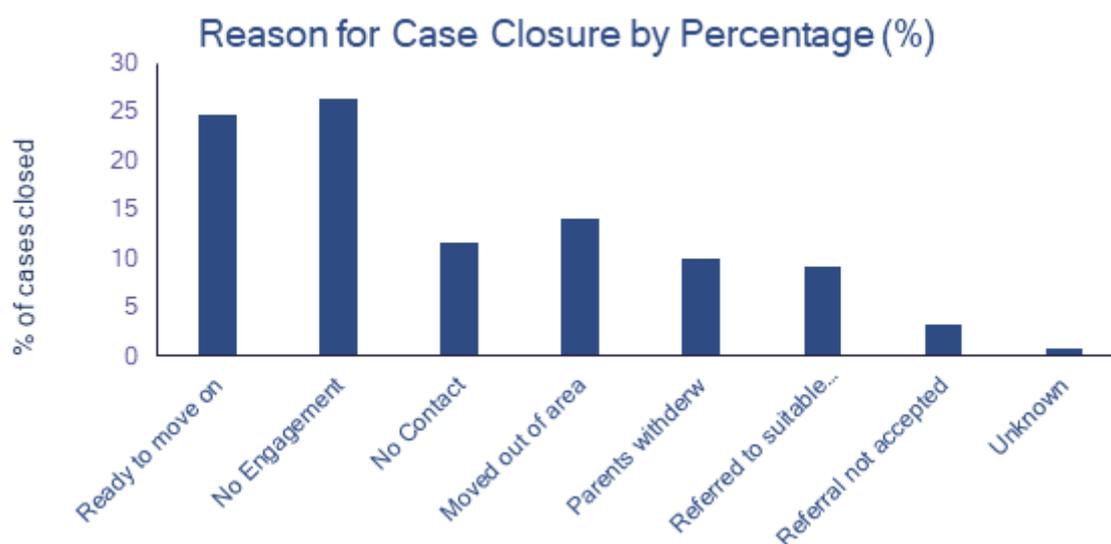


Figure 2. Percentage of case closures and the reason between 2014 and December 31st, 2019.

Young people spent approximately 8 months on average in the programme. Most cases were open between one month and 18 months. There is a positive relationship between the amount of time spent in the programme and the reason the young person's case was closed. Individuals who spent less than 2 months in the programme were more likely to have 'non-engagement' or 'no-contact' listed as closure reasons. However, individuals who spent a year or more in the programme were most likely to have been 'ready to move on'.

Impact on Community

The impact the WVRT has had on the local community has not been assessed for this preliminary report and will be included in the larger evaluation.

Impact on Partners and Similar Service Providers

There is preliminary evidence of positive and trusting relationships between the WVRT and local service providers. For example, local social services and educational institutions have increased the number of referrals to the WVRT. Moreover, Catch 22 (WVRT) was specifically mentioned by the Wolverhampton City Council in a recent newspaper article as doing good work and delivering good programmes around youth violent crime (Express & Star, Jan 23,

2020). There is also a good working relationship between the WVRT and St. Giles Trust. The full impact of the WVRT on local partners and service providers will be investigated more in-depth during the larger evaluation.

Impact on Local Law Enforcement & Legal System

Out of the 324 referrals received between 2014 and 2019, 15.4% ($n = 50$) are known to have reoffended while participating in the One-to-One support programme. Most of these offences occurred by young people referred between 2014 – 2017, with numbers drastically reducing in 2018 and 2019. Of those who offended, 64% were reported as having previous experience with the criminal legal system and the majority had their cases closed due to non-engagement (28%), or they moved out of the area (24%). There are eight young people who have reoffended who have open cases with the programme. It is currently unclear whether those cases are active or if these young people are currently incarcerated.

When the young people who are known to not have reoffended are considered, 83% had previous experience with the criminal legal system. Although the number of young people in this category is small (2% of total referrals), it does give some positive indication of impact in the programme. Although it was unknown whether a large proportion of the young people had reoffended or not during their tenure in the programme (82.7%), it can be assumed that a large proportion of these young people have not reoffended. If these two groups are considered together, it can be assumed that most of the young people receiving one-to-one support do not continue to conflict with the law. Moreover, most of the young people do not seem to become in conflict with law enforcement while engaged with the WVRT. More information may be available during the larger evaluation when the case files are examined.

Impact on NHS

Determining the economic impact of the WVRT on local hospitals and health services is not possible due to how these services record data around injuries from youth violence. One way to determine impact on this item will be to ascertain whether the young people have instigated or been involved in violent altercations whilst engaged in the program. This analysis will be included in the larger evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Impact & Community Relationships

Overall, Catch 22 WVRT provides a needed service in the local area. Since starting the evaluation in late September 2019, it has become apparent that WVRT has strengthened existing partnerships and continues to seek and develop new ones. There is also emerging evidence that the local community and authorities have developed a trusting relationship with the WVRT, however, the full extent of those relationships and the impact still needs to be fully evaluated. Currently, there are no recommendations for impact or community relationships.

Operations

The WVRT is a cohesive group that work well together in a small office space. Not all aspects of operations have been evaluated; however, the referral process and administration of that process was reviewed for this portion of the evaluation. There are two key areas for improvement on this item:

1. *Exploring solutions to missing information on the referral sheets.* It appears that a lot of the demographic and special needs information is missing from the referring organisations despite repeated requests for complete forms from the Site Manager. When the information on the referral forms is reviewed over time, it becomes apparent that less and less information is being included. This could be problematic because the missing information is important to understand the types of young people being referred to the programme and could help with needs assessment. Moreover, more information included on the referral forms can assist the acceptance process and reduce the number of inappropriate referrals to the WVRT. Ensuring only suitable cases are referred to the WVRT could also prevent any transferring of the young person between multiple agencies, which could have negative effects on the young person. **Recommendation** – Review the current referral form for potential improvements and explore ways to stress the importance of complete forms to referring agencies and partners.

2. *Improvements/ optimization of administration software and data entry.* Currently referral and intake information is recorded in an Excel database. Whilst this is not the optimal software for this task, it has all the functionality needed to capture and store the

information. Excel has several built-in capabilities that could optimize the intake process and potentially link to other Excel-based programs to generate reports and facilitate finding information quickly. A solution for this item could also eliminate bulk updates to young persons' files by requiring data to be entered once and updated on all systems (e.g., case closure dates). The feasibility of this recommendation remains to be evaluated as the case notes procedure has not yet been fully examined. **Recommendation** – specific suggestions deferred to full evaluation.

Service Delivery

There are currently no recommendations for Service Delivery as the programmes have not yet been evaluated for evidence-based practice. However, the One-to-One programme has a curiously low completion rate (25%) compared to the other reasons young people leave the programme. Whilst may not be due to any fault in the programme structure or staff delivery, it is worth exploring why some young people no longer engage or elude contact with the support workers. Understanding the reasons behind programme withdrawal may help to improve retention rates, thus furthering the positive reach and impact of the WVRT.

Conclusions

The findings in this preliminary report indicate that the Catch 22 WVRT has contributed some positive impact in the local community. The reach and full scope of that impact is yet to be determined; however, there are no initial concerns around the service being provided to at-risk and fully gang entrenched youth in Wolverhampton.

There are some minor recommendations for improving the referral, intake, and some administrative processes. These suggestions were made mainly to streamline processes and optimize the time and efforts of staff around data entry and information retrieval. Currently the systems and processes appear disjointed and slightly cumbersome, but easily rectified.

The next steps in the evaluation include a full system review of the WVRT operations and processes, as well as a complete evaluation of impact and reach. That portion of the evaluation will commence once all permissions have been obtained (i.e., DBS checks for

evaluation personnel and ethical approval from the affiliated University of Wolverhampton).



Photo by [Tim Marshall](#)

Appendix B – Phase 2 Report

INTRODUCTION

Wolverhampton Violence Reduction Services

The Catch 22 Wolverhampton Violence Reduction Service (WVRS; formerly *WVR Team*) has been operating since 2011. The purpose of the WVRS is to reduce the impact of youth crime and gang related behaviour on young people, their families, and the surrounding community. The WVRS strives to perform this service through evidence-based and best practices. This report is part of a larger evaluation conducted on the WVRS. The aim of the evaluation is to provide evidence of best practices, make recommendations for further improvements, and assess the local impact the service has had on reducing violence amongst young people in Wolverhampton. This is also in line with initiatives undertaken with the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner's office to ensure they are funding programmes that operate based on research and therapeutic intervention.

The preliminary evaluation report focused on the referral process and the young people that use the WVRS one-to-one support service. The impact the WVRS may have in reducing local youth violence and gang activity proved difficult to quantify given the absence of records from the police agencies and NHS for specific costs, or for investigating and dealing with incidents involving severe youth and gang violence. Impact can also be assessed in terms of youth recidivism, youth success stories, community perception, and contribution to the regional initiatives around knife crime and gang involvement; however, the final report will provide a more complete understanding of the WVRS's impact and reach in the local community and the region.

Following the preliminary report, the service has expanded and improved; however, the evaluation was put on hold due to a global pandemic that spanned from early 2020 to late 2021. Within this time the WVRS has undergone several changes in staffing, organisation and management, service offers, processes, and documentation. Most of these changes will be fully reviewed for the final report. This interim report aims to preliminarily assess the current services offered and to provide direction for the final phase of the evaluation.

INTERVENTIONS & EVIDENCE BASE

When working with young and vulnerable people, it is essential that the programmes, services, and interventions are grounded in evidence and that therapeutic fidelity is maintained. For the young people that use the WVRS it is also crucial that the programmes and staff are trauma informed. Several services and programmes offered by WVRS were reviewed for their attributes in this regard (see Table 1). Detailed summaries and observations are provided below. It is important to note that these interventions have been evaluated using only the documentation provided by WVRS and information gleaned from empirical literature (see Table 2). Therefore, therapeutic fidelity, delivery, reception, and efficacy are currently unassessed.

Straight Up

The Straight Up service offers individualised support and mentoring to people between 16 and 30 years of age who are involved, or at risk of involvement, with gangs and gang culture. The service focuses on employability and assistance with accessing financial support.

Evidence-base

The empirical evidence suggests that targeted skills and need-based mentoring approaches have better outcomes than non-targeted relational approaches to individual support (Christensen et al., 2020). The literature is less clear on the effects (short and long-term) of these mentoring programmes with Black male youth (Sanchez et al., 2017). This is particularly relevant for WVRS as the predominant demographic for their one-to-one support programmes are Black or Mixed-ethnicity Black males.

Recommendations

There are no recommendations for this intervention as not enough is currently known about the programme in this phase of the evaluation. Further investigations into the effectiveness of the individual support services (targeted at young people) planned for the final phase of the evaluation. There may be some value with including the Straight Up programme within that analysis as the findings will help inform WVRS practices but could also contribute to the sparse evidence-base of these services for Black youth.

Anger & Emotions Group

The Anger and Emotions Group sessions aim to address difficulties in coping with negative emotions and to promote behavioural change in young people. The service users are identified

by educational staff and session is delivered within an educational setting in groups of four to eight individuals over six 40-minute sessions. Each session contains the same three aims: 1) Introduce key themes, 2) build group rapport, and 3) break down barriers, and a different key focus:

- Session 1 – addressing self-esteem
- Session 2 – managing anger
- Session 3 – identifying ‘good’ and ‘bad’ behaviour
- Session 4 – perceived effects of behaviour on others
- Session 5 – the effects of anger on the body
- Session 6 – consequences of behaviour

The sessions are designed to increase awareness around the young person’s angry feelings and to identify supports and strategies the young person can use to help control their anger. These objectives are assessed through a short self-report questionnaire completed by the young person pre and post intervention. Once all sessions have been delivered, young people also complete a Participant Feedback Form, and the programme facilitator completes a Post Programme Report.

Evidence-base

There is substantial empirical evidence that supports the moderate effectiveness of anger and aggression interventions; however, there are limitations to the literature and thus, the evidence-base. The most effective anger interventions are those that focus on behaviour (least effective are those that use therapy or a psychoeducational focus on emotions; Lee & DiGiuseppe, 2018). Although cognitive-behavioural interventions appear to have the most evidence base, these are generally very heterogeneous treatment packages comprised of a variety of unevaluated components. Whilst the Anger and Emotions intervention also includes several activities and exercises across the sessions, it is a single-approach programme (works with the young person only as opposed to involving others and family members), which is the most successful type of programme strategy for anger management and violence reduction (Park-Higgerson et al., 2008).

Recommendations

1. To fully assess the efficacy of the Anger & Emotions Group, it is recommended that follow-up information is obtained from the school or young

person that gives an indication of behavioural change. This will help WVRS to better track their influence and impact on local and school violence reduction.

2. The pre and post session questionnaires are well constructed and use easy to understand language and a simple rating strategy. However, the Participant Feedback Form is not as user friendly – particularly where accessibility maybe an issue (e.g., young people, cognitive difficulties, developmental delays, learning disabilities, declining mental-health). It is recommended that this form is revisited for ease of use and barriers to comprehension. A re-design of this form may also improve the quality of feedback received.

3. It is recommended that further assessment of this programme is included in the final phase of the evaluation. The intervention contains mostly evidence-based components; however, closer observation will provide more complete information about the efficacy of this programme.

Documents & Tools

The WVRS introduced some tools to aid in the administration and delivery of their services. This section provides more details on those tools and a summary of the evidence-base for each tool. More information can also be found in Table 1 and Table 2.

Outcome Star (My Star™)

The Outcome Star is a self-report measure of need and wellbeing created for children and young people. Out comes are split into two main sections that are comprised of eight indicators rated on a scale from 1 (low) – 5 (high):

- How well other people look after you
 - Physical Health
 - Where you live
 - Being Safe
 - Relationships
- How well you are managing
 - Education and Learning
 - Confidence and Self-esteem
 - Friends
 - Feelings and Behaviour

The Star can be completed by either or both the support worker and the young person and can identify where immediate needs are and where the strengths lie. The Star is accompanied by a place to take notes and capture details on each of the subtopics and an Action Plan template. It has also been integrated into their Lamplight System used for storing and accessing data and case notes.

Evidence-base

There is consensus in the literature that the Outcome Star and similar tools are an effective approach to reducing undesired behaviours, identifying immediate and problematic situations, as well as identifies areas things are going well and where to focus next. It is rated as being easy to use by and with children and is underpinned by solid psychological and therapeutic theories. The Outcome Star also comes in other iterations (e.g., The Justice Star), which is also used by the WVRS.

Service User Feedback Form

The feedback form created by the WVCRS for the one-to-one support programmes is designed to capture Service User experience and assess perceptions of behavioural change and benefits of working with the service. The form is comprised of six questions rated using a Likert-type scale for statement agreement rated using five anchors: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree Strongly Disagree. There is also an open text area for the Service User to give detailed feedback on suggested areas for improvement.

The benefits of collecting feedback to understand Service User experience and identify areas of improvement are well known. However, what is less known and practiced is that soliciting feedback is a targeted and specific endeavour. That is, there must be a question to answer or a reason the feedback is sought. There also needs to be an idea of what poor feedback means and how problem areas will be dealt with. Several factors can influence the quality and veracity of the feedback such as medium where feedback is solicited, design of questions, timing of when the feedback is solicited and the final experience of the participants within the programme.

Recommendations

Whilst there are no immediate or glaring issues with the form currently in use, however, there are opportunities for improvement. Feedback is a chance to compile monitoring data for ongoing self-evaluation and to identify the changing needs of the community and service users.

It is advised to work with the evaluation team to discuss the purpose and intention of the feedback form and ensure it designed to meet those needs. There may also be ways to improve useability and accessibility of the form.

Community Client Induction Pack

The Community Client induction pack is an information packet given to new Service Users upon referral. It is comprised of 13 pages that cover information about Catch 22 and the WVRS, safeguarding, complaints, expectations, consent to services, and contact information. Packages such as this are helpful as a guide through the initial meeting after referral and provide access to information the Service User may need during their involvement with the service.

Recommendations

The induction pack contains relevant and important information for Service Users at any stage of their involvement with WVRS. However, this document is very text heavy and crucial information on each page is not readily identifiable. This significantly reduces accessibility for typically developing young people and even more so for those with mental health, cognition, learning, or developmental issues. It is recommended that

1. the induction pack is revisited for areas where information can be conveyed visually (e.g., infographics) or as tables or illustrations.
2. remaining language is adjusted for easy comprehension at a third-year school level
3. include an information page specifically for Parents/ Guardians/ Carers

Lamplight

Lamplight is an online data management system for charities to store and manage data. The system is designed around a core set of capabilities and processes; however, it can be customized to the needs of the organisation by setting the fields and modules needed. Lamplight is also a service that offers technical and user support. It is a widely recognised service within the UK non-profit and charity sectors.

Lamplight claims to help charities evidence impact and streamline processes. When compared to the Excel based system previously used by WVRT, the Lamplight system is a significant improvement with lots of potential to understand the Service Users and to evidence the

efficacy of the service. Depending on the information being captured, this system may help also answer questions that can evidence behavioural change in the Service Users and demonstrate measurable local impact.

Recommendations

1. To explore the capabilities of the system and ensure it is being used optimally.
2. To explore existing report capabilities and to create evaluative reports to monitor key service indicators.

Next Steps in Evaluation

The original evaluation was planned in three stages: Preliminary observations on documents and processes (completed), Assessing intervention efficacy, and evidencing local impact. Due to the unpredicted global pandemic and a variety of other factors, the evaluation has taken longer than originally anticipated. This interim report serves as an update to the considerable changes undertaken by the WVRS and Catch 22 to implement some of the earlier recommendations and organisationally identified areas for improvement. To avoid further delays in producing evidence of impact and outcomes, we propose that the final two stages of the evaluation are merged into one exercise.

The final two stages of the original evaluation plan are rooted in research initiatives that will examine the following broad questions:

1. What are the needs and strengths of WVRS Service Users and are they being met and capitalized on through the interventions/ services.
2. Are the interventions being delivered whilst maintaining therapeutic fidelity?
3. What are the short-, mid-, and long-term impacts of the WVRS within Wolverhampton and are they contributing to violence reduction and young person wellbeing in their locality?

Within these broad questions, several research aims can also be explored depending on the needs of the organisation.

To answer these research questions, the evaluation team intends to speak with members of WVRS staff and management, selected service users, and any partner organisations (e.g., local

authorities, schools). The evaluation team will also use any monitoring data and case notes to examine questions around the Service users.

No evaluation research will commence until ethical approval is obtained (Newcastle University). Each research initiative will be accompanied by a detailed proposal that will outline the rationale for the study, the question being answered, the targeted participants, the proposed methodology, materials, procedure, and analysis plan. All members of the evaluation team and research assistants have or will have completed DBS checks in place and have obtained a level of training appropriate for the tasks they will undertake.

The final phase of the study is planned to commence in March 2022, with data collection complete by July 2022. A final report complete with research findings is anticipated for September 2022.

Summary

The WVRS has experienced a period of significant growth and change over the last three years. The team and services have emerged strong, and this is a product of solid and competent leadership within WVRS and the larger Catch 22 organisation and a testament to the dedication and passion of the support workers. More information on this work and the subsequent successes will be included in the final report.

The growth and streamlining of the WVRS offer [isare](#) preliminary evidence that they are in tune with the needs of the people and communities they serve as all changes improved and focused their interventions to increase effectiveness. Moreover, there is clear evidence that the WVRS values the empirical evidence around the services they offer and strive to use the most evidence-based and therapeutic tools to assist their clients. At this point in the evaluation, it is clear to the research team that there is some good work happening with the young people of Wolverhampton and the WVRS. The evaluation team looks forward to helping evidence any demonstrable impact of violence reduction due to the efforts of Catch 22 and the WVRS.

Table 1

Interventions and Tools used in the administration and delivery of services offered by WVRS

Intervention	Description	Target Group	Evidence Based	Behaviour Change	Feedback	Follow-up
Anger & Emotions	Group sessions focused on young people identified by school behavioural teams	School Age	Partial	Yes	Yes	No
Outreach Initiative	Two six-week intervention programmes designed to increase awareness of all topics covered by WVRS remit	Youth & Carers	Partial	?	Yes	?
Straight Up	Individualised one-to-one support and mentoring with a focus on financial needs and employability	16-30yrs	Partial	?	Yes	?

Document/ Tool	Description	Target Group	Evidence Based	Accessible	Valid
Outcome Star	Self-report measure of immediate needs. The tool is designed to dynamically capture the change in need and outcomes over the course of the intervention. Accompanied by action-plans and notes.	One-to-one support	Yes	Yes	Yes
Service User Feedback Form	Form designed by WVRS to capture feedback around key outcomes of the 1-to-1 support services	One-to-one support	No	Partially	?
Community Client Induction Pack	Welcome and information package created by WVRS for Service Users	Service Users	?	No	?
Lamplight	Online database system designed around core capabilities but is easy customizable for client needs.	Service Users	N/A	Yes	?

Table 2

Sources used to assess intervention evidence-base. This is not an exhaustive list of evidence for these interventions.

Intervention	Source	Status	Details
Anger and Emotions	1	Agreement	25 violence prevention programmes indicated significant improvements in attitudes, knowledge, or intentions (n = 10) and/or reduction in delinquency rates and violent and/or aggressive behaviour (n = 11); significant changes in both types of outcomes were indicated in 4 programs.
	3	Agreement	Identified 17 interventions as effective in reducing youth-perpetrated violence. These programs represent great diversity in terms of their targeted age groups, strategies implemented to reduce or prevent violence, and length of programming.
	9	Contention	Evaluated the effects of two psychoeducational groups (anger management and goal setting) on state and trait anger, anger expression, and on self-efficacy beliefs of high-risk adolescents. No group effects or group by time interaction effects. Cohen's d effect sizes indicated only small treatment effects for the goal setting group on the State Trait Anger Expression Inventory.
	14	Agreement	Examined the effectiveness of a school and community-based violence prevention program for at-risk eighth-grade students. Findings suggested that mentored students, compared to control group students, had significant reductions in total number and days of suspensions, days of sanction, and infractions committed on school property.
	15	Agreement	Interventions targeted at individuals already manifesting problematic behaviours or demonstrating many of the risk factors associated with the development of offending behaviour are more effective than universally applied programmes.
	2	Agreement	Strong therapeutic relationships (trust, honesty, and transparency) with the young people form the basis of many behavioural programmes, especially Therapeutic Communities.
	11	Agreement	A sense of belongingness is correlated with improved self-esteem and overall well-being. The capacity for responsible agency is central to behavioural change.
	4	Agreement	There are general principles of therapeutic change that are facilitated by both the relationship and technique. It is suggested that these principles of change should both be seen as the active ingredients of therapy.
	17	Agreement	All nationality groups evidence the same rate of juvenile delinquency in the same urban areas. They determined that delinquency was tied to the neighbourhoods and environment. They argued it was not the result of the personal characteristics, but the result of a strong neighbourhood effect.
	16	Agreement	Low economic status, ethnic heterogeneity, residential mobility, and family disruption lead to community social disorganization. In turn this leads to higher crime and delinquency rates.
6	Agreement	Social disorganization theory is a staple of criminological thought. It contributes to understanding the distribution of crime across geographic areas, notably communities, and is extremely important for this.	

Outcome Star	18	Agreement	An effective approach to reducing recidivism is to identify a youth's risk of reoffending and then to match the intensity of interventions to that risk level. There is evidence of several positive outcomes when an evidence-based risk assessment tool, like the outcome star, was implemented to inform pre- and post-dispositional planning.
	12	Agreement	Consistent with previous research, the yLS/CMI did significantly predict recidivism in a sample of youth. This result argues that it should be an instrument in case management.
	10	Agreement	"Learning by doing" – A problem is identified, something is done to resolve it, they then look to see how successful their efforts were, and if not satisfied, try again. Dual commitment in action research to study a system and concurrently to collaborate with members of the system in question to change it in what is seen as a desirable direction for all involved. Accomplishing this requires active collaboration of both a researcher and the client. It stresses the importance of co-learning.
	7	Agreement	Action learning/experiential learning processes are complementary to action research. Highly effective when groups explore problems, when the problems are complex, unclear from the start, and result in new or changed ways of achieving a result.
	8	Agreement	The Outcomes Star draws on the core principles of Action Research and Participatory Action Research; however, it extends them into assessment and outcome measurement. Currently there has been no formal research on the usefulness of the Star, however, due to rapid take-up within the UK and elsewhere there may be some to come.
	5	Agreement	92% of children reported having understood the Star. The majority (65%) reported that they enjoyed completing it. 69% of service deliverers felt that using My Star allowed them to get an overall representation of children's strengths and needs. 64% also reported that it helped them to understand where their focus should be next. Very good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$). No redundancy between areas (No inter-item correlation exceeded the 0.7 threshold). Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test revealed a statistically significant increase in all outcome areas. Medium effect sizes were found for Where you live, Feelings and behaviour and Education and learning, and small-medium effects for the other five outcome areas.
One-to-One Sessions	13	Agreement	Findings provide some support for the efficacy of mentoring interventions. Analysis of 70 mentoring outcome studies, (sample size of 25,286 youth, average age of 12 years old), yielded a statistically significant effect of mentoring programs across all youth outcomes.

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