

Violence in the Thames Valley:

Young people's perspectives
on what causes and prevents it.

January 2023

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Introduction

Foreword

Violence and particularly knife crime ruins lives and damages our communities. It disproportionately effects young people as victims and offenders. Violence also casts a long shadow through the fear of crime that it creates.

We have a growing understanding as to the risk factors that drive violence, but also how effective some measures can be in creating protective environments, as part of a wider shift to earlier intervention and prevention.

Much of our evidence is from our data-led approach to understanding the problem. By its nature, it is quantitative. We know where violence is most prevalent, who it involves and often the causes.

The purpose of this research was to build a more qualitative understanding by giving a voice to young people. These insights complement our [Strategic Needs Assessment](#) and provide a further evidence base to which our violence reduction partnership can respond.

We explored the perceived causes and risk factors. They are wicked in their simplicity; a need to belong, poverty, fear of crime and the risks associated with substance abuse and the wider harms that come with drugs.

We also sought views on the possible solutions and on the value of support. Again, we hear the need to belong and achieve and the importance of strong, trusted role models. Also, there was a self-awareness recognising the importance of developed social skills.

It is encouraging that their feedback reinforces the priorities and approaches the Violence Reduction Unit is taking. I encourage all our partners to consider how these findings can inform their services.

Finally, this research is just part of an ongoing engagement as we continue to work across statutory partners, the voluntary sector and our wider communities as we strive to make the Thames Valley the safest place to be.

Stan Gilmour

Director of the Thames Valley
Violence Reduction Unit



The task

Claremont has been working with the VRU to help provide a better understanding of the experiences and perspectives of young people in the context of serious violence and knife crime in particular. The insights uncovered through qualitative research included:



Young people's understanding of the risk factors which can lead to someone being involved in violence, including knife crime



What the solutions to those risk factors might be



A perspective on the value and impact of support services and activities for young people, across a range of universal and targeted provision

- Claremont worked with as many young people as possible with the resources available, including representation which reflects the diversity of the Thames Valley region
- The research provided a space for young people to think about the causes and possible solutions to youth violence and to have their voice heard
- The research also involved engagement with practitioners who work on a day-to-day basis with young people and have a deep understanding of their lived experiences

Context

- Serious violence and knife crime in particular disproportionately affects young people, so it's vital to seek their views, not only on the causes but also the success and value of support services and interventions.
- This work fits within an established strategic context for the VRU and its wider partnership. It's part of ongoing efforts by the VRU to collaborate with our communities, especially young people, to co-produce solutions to tackling violence together. This is key to the Whole Systems Approach to Serious Violence Prevention (pictured), which highlights the themes of community and collaboration.
- The findings of this report will be shared with VRU partners and the public to inform practice and understanding. The report is an important tool for the partnership to use and reflect upon, when thinking about how to design and improve interventions for young people. It's also something to build on, to develop our insight and understanding even further.
- Through the wide and representative sample, it is hoped that the research findings will provide an evidence base which is useful to the VRU, to the partners it works with across the Thames Valley, but also for those working in the voluntary and community sector and our wider communities.



Methodology

Process

1 ↓

We carried out an initial phase of light **desk research** (inc. input of literature from academics at Greenwich University) to help gain context and help shape our qualitative questioning.

2 ↓

Over a period of **three months** we simultaneously approached more than 30 youth centres, community groups and targeted provision programmes across the Thames Valley area to introduce the research and facilitate discussions with their young people and people working closely with young people.

3 ↓

Conducted an analysis of the recurring themes and insights from the research phase and developed a report.

Considerations

- Sample size of young people involved was **universal in its approach**. Not all VRU partnerships were able to take part – either through lack of availability or because not currently up and running – therefore whilst we did engage some young people from very targeted secondary and tertiary interventions, the majority were from universal youth services in Thames Valley. All were recipients of some kind of youth service (i.e. no recruitment through schools).
- We covered a **decent geographical area** including Newbury, Slough, Reading, Bracknell, Milton Keynes and Oxford – although as we were unable to secure research opportunities in more rural areas, the views of young people represented in this report stem from those living in urban areas.
- We used a **qualitative approach**. All research amongst young people was conducted via in person groups with a semi-structured discussion (except 2 interviews via Zoom). All research amongst practitioners was conducted via Zoom, whether individual interviews or groups, using a semi-structured discussion.
- Where possible we tried to attend **pre-existing youth groups** to avoid adding burden to young people or programme leaders.
- We spoke with young people who were **11–18 years old** (average age was 14) plus one older (27) who had previously been through the Hospital Navigator scheme.

Young People

50

Participants

49 were < 18

1 was > 18

Type of Service

Primary x 5

Secondary x2

Tertiary x 1

Location

Barton (Community centre)

Bletchley (MK)

Bracknell (The Wayz)

Caversham (Grassroots)

Central Milton Keynes
(Hospital Navigator)

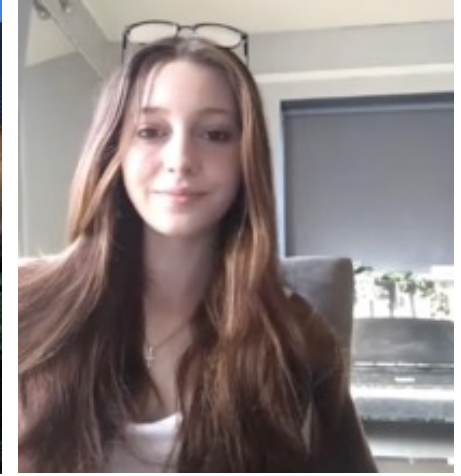
Didcot (SOFEA)

Newbury (Waterside)

Slough (Together as One)



Young People



Young People



Youth Practitioners

25

Youth practitioners

Discussion type

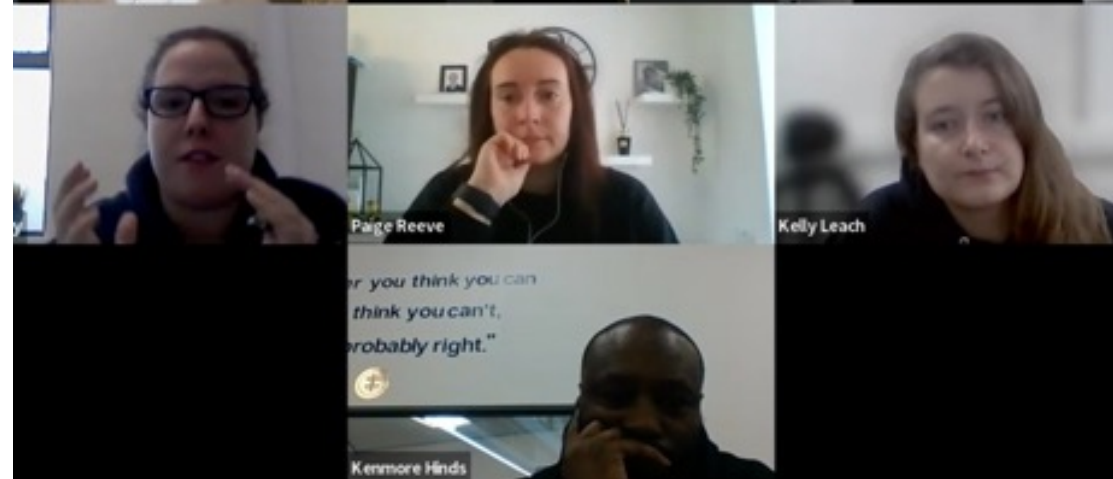
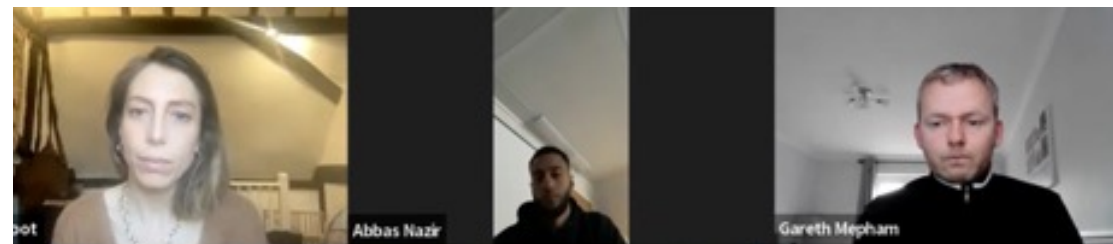
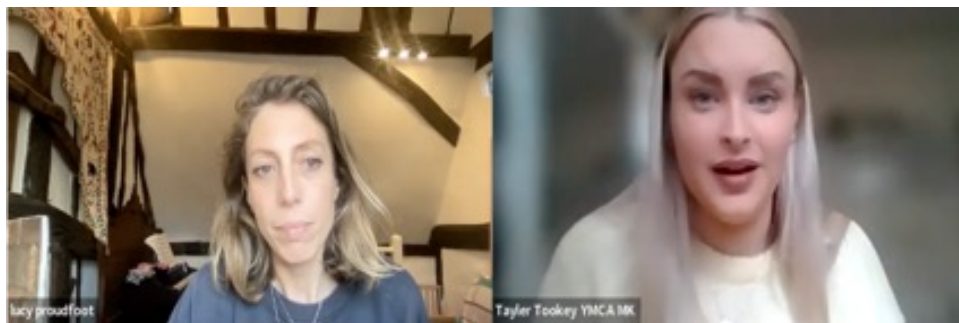
Focus groups
1:1 discussions

Organisations

Oxfordshire Youth
Berkshire Youth
SOFEA (Oxford & MK)
The Alt Prov
The Project PT
MKYMCA
Starting point
EMBS
Together as One (Aik Saath)



Youth Practitioners



Violence in the Thames Valley: Young people's perspectives on what causes and prevents it.

Key lines of enquiry



What might cause a young person to get involved in violent behaviour?



What might prevent a young person getting involved in violent behaviour?



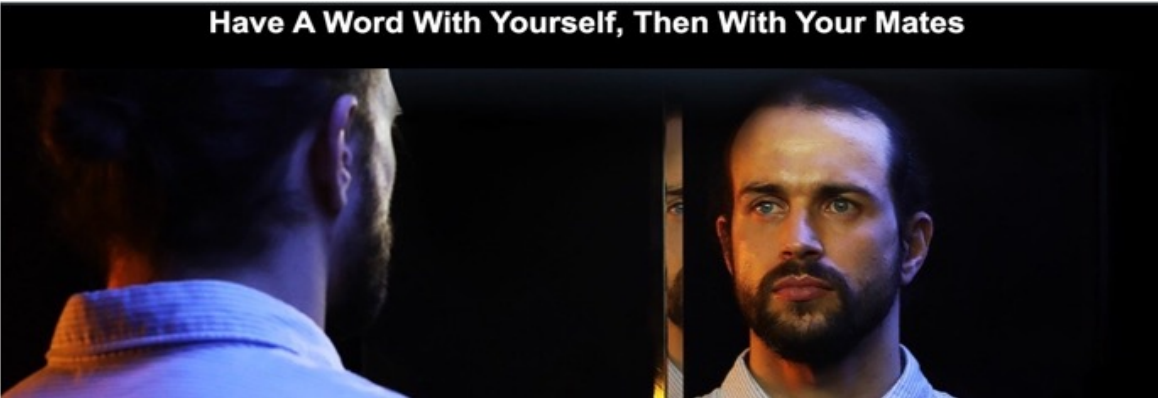
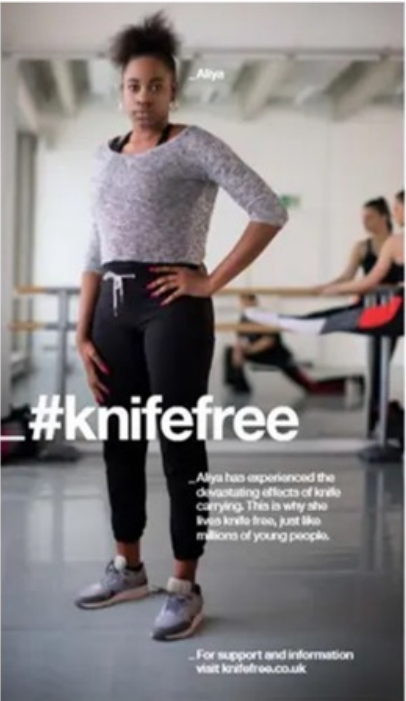
What role do places like X (name of centre) play in keeping young people away from violent behaviour?

Because of the sensitive and potentially triggering subject matter we always made sure we had a youth worker in the room with us to:

- Help foster a sense of trust
- Ensure young people felt safe
- Increase young people's propensity to be open and honest

As a result young people were generally really receptive to talking about the issue, they clearly had stuff they wanted to get off their chest, offload and feel listened to

Example stimuli



Perceptions of

what causes

violent behaviour

Key insights

'THESE ARE
MY PEOPLE'

A need to belong, to be understood,
to be someone

'THE RISKS ARE REAL...
I NEED TO DEFEND MYSELF'

Violence feels like it's always simmering
and when it boils over there's no ignoring it

'MONEY – WHAT OTHER
OPTIONS DO I HAVE?'

It could be the easy way or the hard way,
but money needs to be made

'DRUGS AND VIOLENCE
COME AS A PACKAGE'

Rivalries, disputes, debts – it's a rough trade

Insight 1

'THESE ARE MY PEOPLE'

A need to belong, to be understood, to be someone

- We were frequently given examples by young people of them being **excluded and isolated** from various social touchpoints – home, school, public spaces – and how that made them feel **unwelcome and misunderstood** by (some) adults and authority-figures.
- They felt this added to their boredom, a feeling of not having things to do and places to go, that left them more at risk of getting involved in negative things simply because of **where they are having to hang out**.
- Local 'groups' or 'gangs' were often perceived as providing a **sense of belonging**, a chance to excel at something and alleviate boredom. For some young people (especially those with trickier backgrounds) 'gangs' were felt to be more like a family with a strong **sense of loyalty** between those in the group. We were told about how this loyalty has seen some Young people carrying out acts of violence from a sense of duty; this was talked about as an accepted part of the lifestyle.

- However, **the word 'gang' holds very little currency** and was only used by the really young (11-13 year-olds). In some cases the word sparked negativity, frustration and feelings of being **misunderstood**, particularly among older young people and those previously known to have been involved in violent activity.
 - *'On road', 'in the lifestyle', 'fully involved', 'in it'* – are all preferred to the word 'gang'
- There were frequent mentions of the hierarchy that exists within the lifestyle – *Elders > Youngers > people on the edge* – which suggests **sophisticated and widespread awareness of how groups operate**.

Desk Research:

As young people age, they become more sceptical of parents and adults (Cottrell et al., 2022) and peer relationships become more important.

Evidence suggests that parental influence occurs, however there is little consensus about its strength. Furthermore, as young people age, they become more sceptical of parents and adults (Cottrell et al., 2022) and peer relationships become more important.



Practitioner view:

A recurring theme was the role of environment in shaping outcomes and how many Young people, who already have disruptive family lives, struggle at home and at school where they regularly fall short of the expectations placed upon them.

Behaviour that may stem from the lack of ability to self regulate, emotional trauma or being misunderstood (often through lack of time on teachers' part) that is regarded as aggressive or unacceptable leads to frequent cases of punishment, exclusion and isolation from the system.

*This exclusion and isolation leaves young people vulnerable and exposed to needing a **place where they can belong.***

Gang/group/on road lifestyle strikes a chord with many young people who are looking to excel or just fit in somewhere. They are providing the critical infrastructure these young people crave (sense of belonging, ability to excel, family loyalty, love even). It's often the only place they feel comfortable or wanted.

It offers a family-like structure: elders > youngers. With this lifestyle comes violent behaviour.

Many practitioners talked of the sadness of it being 'too late' to help some young people who were so deeply entrenched.

These are my people

“In the School system, you’re told by teachers you’re nothing. I’ve seen teachers be vile to kids sometimes just cos they’ve got a bunch of shit going on at home which they bring in to school.”

(Young person, Didcot)

“If you haven’t got a good family life, you go out and have your group of friends that feels like family to you, you feel connected to them then you want to associate more with them... that gets you involved with other stuff. You want to defend your own ‘family’ cos these lot are more close to you than your own family are.”

(Young person, Slough)

“At school they’re often punished for the chaotic lifestyles they’ve got”

(Practitioner, Reading)

“In my experience I’ve noticed a lot of young people gravitate to the family that surrounds them, doesn’t have to be blood and I feel a lot of young people have been telling us that through their language and I don’t know if a lot of people take the language that they use seriously. They’ve been making that very clear how they address each other and refer to each other. It’s all there in the language they use. I think a lot of the time the professionals don’t take it seriously and look at it as that’s just the way kids speak”

(Practitioner, Oxford)

Insight 2

'THE RISKS ARE REAL... I NEED TO DEFEND MYSELF'

Violence feels like it's always simmering and when it boils over there's no ignoring it

- We observed that for many of the young people we spoke with, **violence feels omnipresent**. They talked about violent incidents that had taken place in their local areas, recent teacher/police interventions, school bags being searched, parents being fearful, and how all these things come together to create a sense that **violence is never far away and will occur**. With that comes an acceptance that violence is part of their landscape – a fact of their lives - and a resultant feeling that they need to be 'on their guard.'
- The young people they know who carry knives, or act violently, are perceived as doing it for their own safety, to defend themselves from danger and 'keep their mothers away from their gravesides'.

- In groups where young people had been closer to violent incidents there was a strong sentiment that they'd rather end up hurting someone else than losing their own life.
- Whilst many seemed numbed by the frequency of local attacks and somewhat accustomed to violence being a reality, they seemed to welcome the chance to talk about it in a safe space.
- We also observed that the level of fear felt by the young people we spoke with wasn't always directly proportionate to the level of violence they personally experienced – for example, fear appeared to be highest amongst young people who were not directly involved in violent behaviour and living in areas where there is a low level of reported violent crime; however, for young people living in these areas, **fear of violence still shapes the way they behave** (not going out, going straight home from school, buying safety gadgets online).

Desk Research:

Literature tends to agree that individuals who are victims or witnesses of violence are then more likely to carry weapons due to their heightened awareness of violent acts (Browne et al., 2022).

The risks are real... I need to defend myself



Practitioner view:

The idea of 'normalisation' of violence came up quite a bit in conversation with practitioners. Several practitioners felt that the extent of young people's exposure to violence at a young age – in their home, amongst peers or in the area they live in- was a key contributing factor to their own violent behaviour.

Exposure to violence via cultural influences also came up among practitioners - social media, drill music, language were all thought to contribute to normalisation and acceptance of violent behaviour.

However, several practitioners talked about how many young people know on a deeper, visceral level, that violence isn't normal, especially when they're given the time to question it in safe space.

The risks are real... I need to defend myself

"It (bag searches) doesn't make me feel safe at all. It feels like they don't trust us. We should be trusted. Bag searches invade our privacy"

(Young person, Caversham)

"I never feel safe, there's always something. Even when walking the dog I've always got to look behind me. It's a natural instinct to look behind you 24/7"

(Young person, Bracknell)

"Especially for the year 7s to hear that there was a stabbing in the year 11s, I think that installs a sense of fear, if you're hearing about that in a year 7 environment that must give you some sense of fear... you're thinking is this going to happen to me, is that what it's like?"

(Young person, Milton Keynes)

"No young person wakes up and says 'today I've got to do this'. It's fight or flight, 'I've got to defend myself'. When I speak to young people about carrying knives it's like 'But I have no choice. It's to defend myself' that's what I hear time and time again, 'what do I do? How do I get out?' And if they could rewind the clock they'd do it all differently, all over again"

(Practitioner, Oxford)

Insight 3

'MONEY – WHAT OTHER OPTIONS DO I HAVE?'

It could be the easy way or the hard way, but money needs to be made

Money – having it, not having it, acquiring it, spending it – came up multiple times in all our groups and interviews.

It was seen as something that gets people into violent behaviour initially and sustains it:

- **Deprivation, cost of living** – for many of the young people we spoke with and our practitioners dealt with, there's a real and immediate need to obtain money for themselves and their family.
- **Perceived ease and speed with which money can be obtained** - the potential to earn significant amounts of £, faster is very compelling to some young people, particularly in comparison to other options such as low-paid, low-skilled employment.

- **The buzz** – an initially quite intoxicating lifestyle then escalates and becomes more serious, in some cases leading to cycles of debt.

Although some of the means of making money young people referred to were plainly illegal, we did get the impression their behaviours were well-meaning and it wasn't their intent to inflict or get caught up in violence, even if it did end up that way on occasions. Indeed, our researchers were struck by how, in some cases, young people displayed strong – yet unharnessed – entrepreneurial talents that came across in the way they articulated their experiences of making money and conducting business.

Money – what other options do I have?



Practitioner view:

Professionals typically took a more holistic view and while they rarely cited money as a single cause of violence they recognised it as a contributing factor for young people's involvement in violent behaviour.

They often saw it manifesting as a chance to get new things; to earn an elevated status amongst peers or to relieve financial pressure on their families (especially in Slough, Reading, Milton Keynes).

Money – what other options do I have?

“Let’s say at home their mum is struggling... getting a job at Tesco they’re only getting £10 an hour, like £1000 a month but on the road they’re getting £300 a day, up to a £1000, even more, so why would they go and work at Tesco when they could get on the road? It’s just quick, easy money. So people just go straight into the road and sell drugs. Easy way out”

(Young person, Slough)

“Someone that’s really on it, they’re making £1000s a week, the only life they know is making money through even trapping or getting man down.”

(Young person, Slough)

“If your parents can’t afford to put food on your table that’s a struggle no one wants to feel that. I don’t want to see my mum crying cos she can’t feed me. So that’s going to make me go and do something, it’s not cos I’m a bad person. Your intentions are good but bad things come with it. These people are coming from low-income houses, they’re trying to make their life a bit easier. Their mentality is to go to the street and make some fast money not knowing the consequences come with violence – knives and all that”

(Young person, Milton Keynes)

Insight 4

'DRUGS AND VIOLENCE COME AS A PACKAGE'

Rivalries, disputes, debts – it's a rough trade

There was universal recognition amongst young people that drugs go hand in hand with violent behaviour. Drugs were frequently mentioned as being part of the cycle of the problem for two key reasons:

- **Taking drugs:** young people felt that being under the influence of drugs (inc. alcohol) may increase someone's likelihood of acting in a violent way.
- **Selling drugs:** young people recognised a link between selling drugs and carrying out violent behaviour. It was often referred to as 'coming with the territory' and something you'd have to be prepared for if you ended up dealing.

Drugs and violence come as a package



Practitioner view:

Like money, drugs were frequently mentioned by most practitioners as a factor for young people's involvement in violent behaviour – taking them, selling them, getting into debt then being stuck in a lifestyle - however, no practitioners took the view that drugs were the root cause of violence. They tended to see a bigger picture linked to young people's background – E.g. they took drugs because they wanted to alter their mood or alleviate boredom, or they sold drugs because of the need to earn money quickly or elevate status.

Drugs and violence come as a package

“Even if we’re not smoking those drugs they’re still brought up by those people. Kids get taught to carry knives, drugs, they’re bought up like that”

(Young person, Bracknell)

“There’s a lot of low level cannabis smoking & dealing – children who use it don’t buy it off middle aged dealers, it’s off 17 yr old mates up the road so when that goes wrong that can escalate”

(Practitioner, Bracknell)

“Young people are groomed using low-class drugs, lots of fear used to get them to do stuff, fear leads to violence”

(Practitioner, Oxford)

Young people and practitioners share similar views on the complexity that sits behind the causes of violent behaviour. However, practitioners tend to take a **broader socio-ecological view** of its causes. They observe that there tends to be a **sequence of events**:

Early family life chaos + exposure to violence/ trauma normalises violence AND burdens the young person with heavy emotions.

Manifests as aggressive behaviour which is labelled 'violence'. In school system they get punished and labelled as 'naughty kid', which leads to repeated failure + exclusion = low self esteem and a need to belong and excel.

Gang lifestyle offers a feeling of belonging, achieving something, earning money, being someone.

young people are trapped in the 'lifestyle' without an obvious way out.

Build up of negative emotions internally that they don't know how to regulate, communicate or rationalise.

Isolation from the school system PLUS repeated exclusion from other areas of life (shops/ McDonalds, peer group, home) leaves them vulnerable to exploitation.

Violence and drugs come with the territory – violent behaviour invariably linked to disputes; in this context it's revered, they get status and finally get to excel.

What might

prevent violence?

Summary

'A SPACE TO BE (PHYSICAL)
AND BELONG (EMOTIONAL)'

'CHANCES TO LEARN AND
ACHIEVE SOMETHING'

'SOMEONE I CAN TRUST,
SOMEONE WHO GETS IT'

'PREVENTION STARTS
WITH STAYING CALM'

SPACES TO JUST BE... AND BELONG

- Many of the young people impressed on us how important it was for them to have access to a **physical place** that prevents them having to linger on the street (or other places) where they're vulnerable to being drawn in to negative/dangerous situations.
- Whilst acknowledging our skewed sample (most research participants were users of youth centres) and the locations that most of our groups were run in (community centres and other similar spaces), the strength of their feelings warrants this point being part of our report.
- All the young people we spoke with cited the importance of having access to youth centres and diversion programmes as a way of preventing violence and antisocial behaviour and it was notable how many articulated this with great passion. These spaces were clearly important to them **on an emotional level**. Young people told us they mattered because they are:
 - **Sanctuaries - a lifeline, a safe haven**, somewhere where they feel they won't come to any harm or get chucked out from.
 - **Somewhere to just be themselves** - where they fit in because other people are either similar to them or have shared experiences (be it the other young people or practitioners).
 - **A chance to make new friends**. Many young people welcomed the chance to make new friends outside of a school environment - for some young people these were their only friends.
 - **Providing the right amount of boundaries and structure** – often lacking in home life, it adds to increased feelings of security.
 - **A chance to have fun!** To get away from the 'drama' or 'chaos' that's commonly part of their lives and not worry about school, family, money and feeling on edge.



Practitioner view:

Practitioners are equally passionate about the tangible benefits of the spaces they're creating and the link between them and preventing violence.

Several practitioners commented that the impacts of the pandemic have made it harder for young people to make connections and they've missed out on vital social development that these places offer.

Typical principles and practices practitioners adopt that help to create safe spaces are:

- *Setting **realistic expectations** – just knowing a young person wants to turn up is enough*
- ***Limiting pressure** to get involved in anything – just making it available is enough*
- *Providing a **non-school environment** – no punishment for swearing, smoking or anger*

- *Providing opportunities for young people to be given acknowledgement for their **positive attributes***
- *Employing staff with high levels of **emotional literacy** – who won't react adversely, who are trustworthy, experienced, empathetic*
- *Providing staff with good training and support – training them to **listen not judge***

Spaces to just be... and belong

“For some people home is where you feel safe or wanted...but we always look forward to coming in to SOFEA – if we could we be here early early early ”

(Young person, Milton Keynes)

“Here they’ll let you know whether your choice was the right or wrong one. I like that”

(Young person, Caversham)

“This place is like a Timeout place, like X says you’re safe. If anything happens, staff are going to be there straightaway. It’s a Timeout place”

(Young person, Bracknell)

“At the moment, kids get to speak to a youth worker but it’s because they’ve been a pain. Where’s that open access support you can get that isn’t as a consequence or a sanction? They just need more space to be a young person, I think that’s the bit that’s missing”

(Practitioner, Bracknell)

“It’s a place to have fun, instead of going outside and make trouble I can have fun in here.”

(Young person, Barton)

'SOMEONE I CAN TRUST, SOMEONE WHO GETS IT'

- Again acknowledging our particular sample set who tended to be engaged in the youth sector, the young people we spoke with were passionate about the youth workers they'd encountered. **Youth workers were very often held in high regard – liked, respected and trusted.** This was in stark contrast to how they tended to talk about teachers.
- It was obvious that for many of the young people, they greatly valued the chance to forge meaningful relationships with individuals who care about them and **don't judge them** for what they've done in the past – the word 'judgey' came up quite a lot.
- For a variety of complex reasons, a lot of the young people we spoke to had adults – often family members and teachers – in their life who were somehow falling short. The young people clearly valued the presence of an adult who made them feel **heard, understood, supported and listened to.**
- Some young people felt very strongly that only when you make the effort to get to know their world, 'walk in the shoes they wear' and speak their language will you begin to understand the violence that exists in it.
- We were given many examples of individuals who'd given them a bit of tough love, helped them avoid trouble or simply given them a sense of purpose – effectively describing them as **role models.** The commonality was that these were people they were able to talk to safely about their lifestyle and ask questions about it in a healthy way.

Someone I can trust, someone who gets it



Practitioner view:

*Almost universally, practitioners told us that **time** is the key ingredient when it comes to diverting young people away from violent behaviour. Time to get to know them, support them as an individual, understand them, what they're dealing with and where they are right now. It's about having enough time with a young person to work through some of the reasons that might be behind their behaviour.*

Several practitioners highlighted the risks linked to not taking time to understand young people's language and cultural influences.

The focus needs to be on building impactful relationships outside of the young people's normality in order to grow empathy, improve communication and self respect.

Two recurrent themes from practitioners were

*– **It's a long game, there's no quick win, but the benefits are tangible.***

And

*– **Lack of time – in particular projects being cut short – can impede any positive work already done and undo trust.***

Someone I can trust, someone who gets it

“There’s a non-judgemental understanding, I can say the most outrageous stuff and XX has to compose herself but they have a lot of on hand experience”

(Young person Milton Keynes)

(Talking about youth worker) “She’s kind, someone you would want to hang out with. She’s really supportive. Someone you can go to if there’s something wrong. Really approachable, someone to speak to if there’s a problem, she can get involved (like pass information on to other people). She isn’t judgemental. She’s not just a youth worker, she’s a friend. She’s a lot more passionate about our wellbeing and future. Teachers don’t have much respect for us, they think we don’t do much and don’t try. She believes we can do stuff and she puts us forward for everything.”

(Young person, Bracknell)

“6 or 9 months projects are not long enough, these kids need years ”

(Practitioner, Oxford)

“You can’t change someone’s behaviour in 12 sessions over 12 weeks with 12 hours of work. Consistency and not going away are key”

(Practitioner, Newbury)

“They critically need a relationship OUTSIDE of their normality. Someone who can model a different way and say ‘it doesn’t have to be your story’. It’s not changing behaviour, it’s building relationships.”

(Practitioner, Reading)

'CHANCES TO LEARN AND ACHIEVE SOMETHING'

- Many of the young people we spoke with expressed desires to have access to opportunities to **learn and develop skills** in a fun, non-school, non-judgmental environment. They reasoned that they needed an alternative to the allure of the 'easy' money they can earn 'on road'.
- Some of the young people who said they were not succeeding at school talked about the benefits of being able to **excel at something**, to feel good about themselves and channel their energies into that.
- A significant number of the young people reported that they had increased their self awareness, emotional resilience and empathy for others as a result of their experiences at diversionary programmes or youth centres. In some instances, over time this had enabled them to become **part of the solution** by helping others like them – e.g. through mentoring schemes.



Practitioner view:

Practitioners support the young people findings and understand that activities are beneficial for social development and can be effective for diverting young people away from violent behaviour.

They give young people the chance to be good at something, develop confidence, develop a sense of agency, and help them see an alternative future lifestyle.

Practitioners recognise that for many young people their parents can't afford to offer anything themselves, and therefore what the services offer is a critical resource to young people.

Several practitioners made the same point about being proactive: waiting to provide interventions is too late and too linked to something punitive; offering more universal services by default is a more effective use of funds.

Chances to learn and achieve something

“You learn, you get life skills, get taught, do things you wouldn’t normally do. Stuff we’d never have been able to do.”

(Young person, Slough)

“I think there should be more schemes to help people understand that they can make money through working – not just rubbish jobs like being a cleaner, they’d rather do something more exciting e.g. helping out at a law firm – making money from something they actually want to do”

(Young person, Slough)

'PREVENTION STARTS WITH STAYING CALM'

There are better ways of handling things, young people just need to be shown how

- Several of the young people demonstrated an understanding that violent behaviour (theirs or others) was linked to poor communication skills and limited ability to self regulate.
- This level of self awareness and emotional intelligence was particularly apparent among those who'd received interventions through programmes such as SOFEA/YMC.
- Among a significant number of the young people we spoke with, there seemed to be an appetite for finding 'another way' of dealing with things, an openness to learning alternative ways of communicating and managing emotional responses.

Prevention starts with staying calm



Practitioner view:

A young person's inability to self-regulate (because no one's taught them how) and communicate effectively were commonly cited by practitioners as being big contributors to violence amongst young people.

Practitioners frequently talked about the benefits of helping young people deal with and make sense of their emotions to the point where they're able to self-regulate, communicate better and adopt a more rational way of thinking.

There's a recurring emphasis on helping young people understand their journey, their influences and the impact that has on their behaviour. Many practitioners' aim is to get young people to a position where they feel comfortable enough to talk about their experiences, their feelings and start to question things and challenge the status quo.

Crucially it's about helping the young people figure out for themselves that it's not their fault and they do actually have control over how they respond to adversity.

Positive activities (that highlight young people's positive attributes) and positive role modelling (practitioners reacting calmly, without adversity) play a big part in this.

Prevention starts with staying calm

“There are other ways of communicating, you might hate that one person but that doesn’t mean you have to do something bad to them. It’s communication – there are other ways out of an argument”

(Young person, Bracknell)

“The biggest reason for violence is young people not being able to understand and rationalise their emotions – they don’t know how to verbalise them so they use other ways to express. This is exacerbated by what they see in media and often their own homes where their parents are the same so it’s all they’ve seen”

(Practitioner, Oxford)

“For someone like me – The times I’ve been violent have never been to do with beef shit or road shit, it’s more that I’ve had a meltdown or breakdown, something where you’re really scrambled, you don’t know what’s going on or what you’re doing”

(Young person, Didcot)

**What is it about
this place?**

Themes

'WANTED'

Welcoming, second home, non judgey, diverse, friendly, inclusive, heard and understood, caring

'BOUNDARIES'

Structure, routine, asked not told

'SECURE'

Safe, sense of comfort, no violence, relaxing

'JOY'

Fun, entertainment, not boring, really fun

'SOCIABLE'

Social, friends, have food, play games

'DEVELOPMENT'

Life skills, learning, on my terms

What is it about this place?

“So much fun”
“Food”
“Inclusive, diverse, cohesive”
“Future”
“No violence”
“Caring”
“Safe”

“Happy”
“Life skills”
“Opportunity”
“Educational”
“Makes you feel safe”
“Place to go, no lurking”

Aik Saath

“Time to be – chill, have a coffee, chat, do a bit of work.”
“Equal”
“Community”
“Asked not told”

SOFEA, Didcot

“Place to interact”
“Monitored and safe”
“Something in common with others”
“Non judgemental & understanding”
“Heard and understood”

YMCA MK

“Gives me purpose”
“Friends”
“Food”
“Lot more routine than home”
“Peer support”
“Safe”
“Wanted”
“Second home”

SOFEA, MK

What is it about this place?

“Fun”
“Big”
“Organised events”
“Fun – instead of going outside and making trouble”
“Relaxing”
“Clubs (drama, sport)”

Barton

“Feels safe here”
“Gets you away from life”
“It’s a Timeout place”
“Good friends”
“Protected”

The Wayz Bracknell

“Fun, see friends”
“Chill”
“Socialisation. Know most of the people already”
“Bored at home”
“Reason to go out”
“Friendly”
“Interesting”
“Not boring”
“Entertaining”
“Welcoming”

Grassrootz

“Friendly”
“Kind”
“Safe environment”
“Makes you want to keep coming back”
“something to do, a place to go, do exercise”
“Hang out with people with similar interests”

Waterside

Areas for

exploration

What does this mean for you?

- How much do we explore with young people other ways of **feeling safe**? What alternatives do they think they have?
- How can we best take time to **understand young people**, their language, their cultural influences, their motives in more depth?
- To what extent can we **create more fun and build connections** between peers and adults?
- How is our programme helping to develop **young people's critical thinking**, emotional resilience, self awareness, conflict resolution and social skills?
- What happens if we look more closely at the **motivation behind behaviour**? E.g. how does it start to look if we see young people's driver to earn money as unharnessed entrepreneurialism?
- To what extent are we considering the **longevity factor** of a programme & damage? Might it do more damage if we can't commit to it for long enough?
- How well are we doing at achieving the factors needed for **young people to thrive** (listed in slide 34)?

A group of people are gathered around a table in a meeting room. In the background, a banner with the word 'TOGETHER' is visible. The scene is dimly lit, with a blue tint. The text 'What can you do to build on this?' is overlaid on the image in two teal boxes.

**What can you do
to build on this?**

With thanks to young people and practitioners from

- Alt provision
- Barton Community Association
- Berkshire Youth
- EMBS, Oxfordshire
- Grassrootz, Caversham
- Oxfordshire Youth
- Oxfordshire County Council
- SOFEA Didcot
- SOFEA Milton Keynes
- Starting Point
- The Mustard Tree
- The Project PT
- The Wayz, Bracknell
- Together As One (Aik Saath)
- Waterside, Newbury
- YMCA hospital Navigator Scheme

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