

Thames Valley  
Violence Reduction Unit

# Quarterly Highlight Report

Delivery year 2023–2024  
Q3: 1 Oct–31 Dec

# Foreword

by **Jules Bottazzi**, Head of the Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit

---

Colleagues,

Happy New Year! I hope you enjoy this first VRU Highlight Report, coinciding with the January Strategy Board. We've listened to your feedback and hope that this new briefing will give an overview of the progress of VRU-funded interventions, demonstrate impact both quantitatively and qualitatively, and capture some of the stories from our providers as they work with our young people.

This also gives me the opportunity to deliver some key messages. Thank you for the feedback regarding a new name for the VRU and a renewed core purpose. Your comments were enormously helpful. The timing of the consultation – it closed just before Christmas – doesn't allow us to share the full results with you just yet, but I can tell you that the most popular name, as voted by us all, is **Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership**. We will now work on new branding with the intention that we will rebrand from the April Strategy Board. At that point, we will be able to suggest a new operating model based on the feedback you've given us around simplifying the meeting structures and our vision and purpose too.

Thank you also to local partnerships for delivering your Strategic Needs Assessments and Strategies to us for us to collate and return to the Home Office as one overarching Thames Valley Violence Reduction Strategy to meet the deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> January.

I've now been in post long enough to assess the current suite of interventions in this three-year delivery plan, as agreed by all of us, the last year of which is fast approaching! My ethos is quality over quantity – that is, it makes more sense to trial and evaluate a few strategically chosen interventions well rather than spread the money over more projects with less potential for reliable evaluation. Robust evaluation is, after all, key to what the VRU grant asks of us, in order that all projects are sustainable and worthwhile.

Part of my job as Head of the VRU is, naturally, to see where things aren't working so well or where we cannot deliver according to the grant guidelines. As such, due to low numbers of vetted volunteers and difficulties with evaluating to a statistically significant degree,



**Jules Bottazzi**

Head of the Thames Valley  
Violence Reduction Unit

I've taken the difficult decision that we should cease the Custody Navigator Volunteers scheme as of March 2024. Although a lot of excellent work has been done by both staff and the volunteers, we have not been able to prove that this project reduces serious violence, and therefore this money will be funnelled into another, existing project. (Note: Custody Coaches is a separate intervention and continues).

You may remember a proposal for a MASH intervention was brought to partners for ratification before I joined the VRU. The Home Office have been exacting in their questions before we were able to begin but they recognise the potential and we are working to finalise the approach.

Although we continue to work to the agreed three-year delivery plan, we have made some changes to how we allocate spending for next year – the last year of the current indicative budget for all VRUs. We feel that a larger proportion of the grant funding should be spent on the interventions as opposed to core programme team staffing costs, something colleagues had raised previously. Of the '23-'24 grant, roughly 46% was allocated to staffing costs, 40% on interventions, 9% in research and evaluation, and 5% on data sharing (our contribution to the *Thames Valley Together* programme). An early breakdown of spend for the next financial year currently profiles roughly 25% on staffing costs, 64% on interventions, 6% in research and evaluation, and 5% on TVT. I hope this demonstrates our commitment both to listening and responding to your feedback, while doing the very best we can to keep the young people of the Thames Valley safe.

Finally, I couldn't finish without congratulating Tori Olphin, our Head of Research and Evaluation, who was awarded an MBE in the King's New Year Honours list for services to technology in the public sector. Tori is an exceptionally talented individual who brings such rigour and compassion to her work. Also, huge congratulations to Richard Kennell, Chief Executive of SOFEA, which delivers the Schools Navigators programme in Milton Keynes, who was awarded an MBE for services to social inclusion and the alleviation of food poverty.

I welcome your feedback on this report, and send my warmest best wishes to you all,



**Jules Bottazzi**

Head of the Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit



**Jules Bottazzi**

Head of the Thames Valley  
Violence Reduction Unit

# VRU interventions & wider programme activities

Intervention	Summary	Area
Hospital Navigators	Trained volunteers offer support in A&E to those admitted in risky circumstances	All Thames Valley through the five A&E sites
Custody Coaches	Youth workers work with those in police custody, offering ongoing mentoring and support	Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Berkshire (not Buckinghamshire)
Custody Navigator Volunteers	Volunteers work with those in police custody to offer short-term support & signposting	Oxfordshire (Abingdon) and Buckinghamshire (Aylesbury)
Schools Navigators	Youth workers in schools provide 1-2-1 mentoring and social skills support to children at risk of exclusion	Milton Keynes
Focused Deterrence	Support-first, social care-led model of diversion, supported by police enforcement	Milton Keynes
Sports & Inclusion	“Sports Plus” activities, providing positive sports and inclusion activities accompanied by mentoring and education	Six projects in Oxford, Milton Keynes, Reading, Slough and High Wycombe
Operation Paramount	Partnership between Thames Valley Police and charity Children Heard & Seen, improving support for families following parental imprisonment	Rolling out to all of Thames Valley
‘Stay True to You’ behaviour change resources	Research and development of new behavioural change approaches and resources for practitioners, parents, young people	All Thames Valley
Family Drug & Alcohol Court	Working with the Centre for Justice Innovation to establish an FDAC in Berkshire	Berkshire
Sustainable Training	Supporting partners with training needs associated with violence prevention	All Thames Valley
Thames Valley Together	A partnership programme working to develop a multi-agency data-sharing platform and analytical products	All Thames Valley







# At a glance – all VRU intervention delivery

**1320**

Total individuals engaged  
so far in 2023/2024

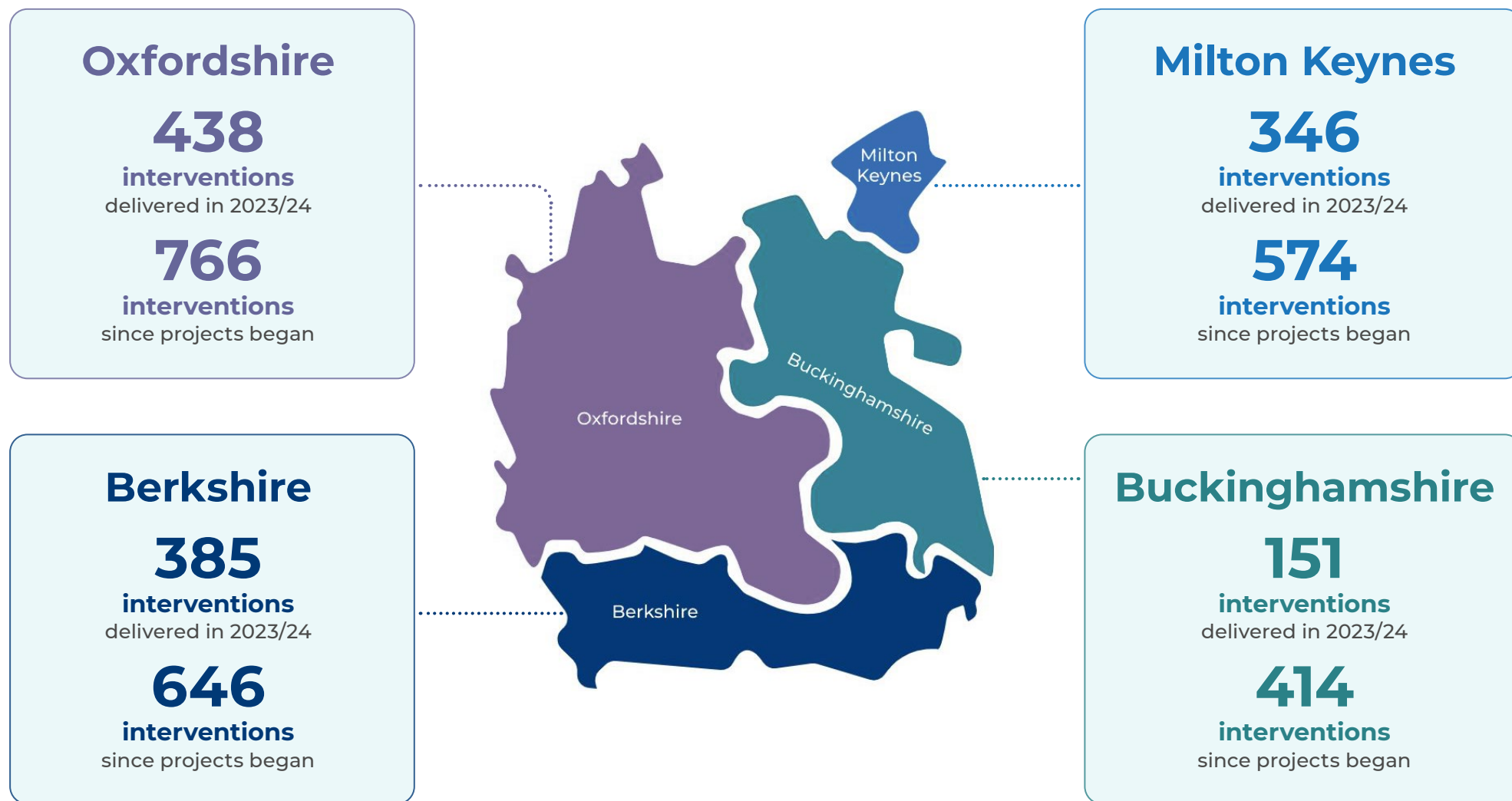
**2400**

Total individuals engaged  
since projects began

Intervention	Delivery 2023/2024	Since projects began
 Hospital Navigators	<b>525</b>	<b>1013</b>
 Custody interventions	<b>523</b>	<b>801</b>
 Schools Navigators	<b>59</b>	<b>263</b>
 Focused Deterrence	<b>45</b>	<b>45</b>
 Sports & Inclusion	<b>127</b>	<b>208</b>
 Operation Paramount	<b>41</b>	<b>70</b>

Note: Count is of individuals engaged. Custody is both Coaches & Volunteers counts combined. Sports and FD programmes retain individuals over time. Paramount is count of referrals made to Children Heard & Seen.

# At a glance – VRU intervention delivery in local areas



# VRU intervention updates

The following pages provide updates on those interventions funded by the VRU from the Home Office grant.





# Intervention update

## Hospital Navigators

Our longest running VRU intervention, covering the whole Thames Valley through the five A&E departments.

We work with five voluntary sector providers to deliver the schemes in their local hospitals, including:

- YMCA MK (Milton Keynes)
- 7Roadlight (Aylesbury)
- Oxfordshire Youth (Oxford)
- Starting Point (Reading)
- Together As One (Slough)

Oxfordshire Youth has recently taken on the scheme at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, replacing Connections Support.

Oxford Brookes University is finalising the first evaluation report for March and there will be a partnership Knowledge Exchange event to follow. These results will inform the ongoing positive discussions with local commissioners with regard future sustainability.

By hospital site	Delivery 23/24	Delivery since project began
Milton Keynes	160	236
Buckinghamshire	118	352
Oxfordshire	21	73
Berkshire – Reading	47	131
Berkshire – Slough	179	221

Read about the latest successes in the case study on [page 23](#).





# Intervention update

## Custody interventions

Two separate interventions use the point of arrest and detention to create a “reachable moment” when support is offered which aims to address any wider circumstances that may drive offending.

**Custody Coaches** are trained youth workers offering immediate support to address harmful behaviours and life circumstances, providing an enduring mentoring role.

Coaches from MK Dons Sports & Education Trust and Reading FC Community Trust are operational in three custody suites covering Milton Keynes and Berkshire. Vetting processes are being finalised with new provider Aspire, which will operate in Abingdon, Oxfordshire.

A new VRU-coordinated Randomised Control Trial has commenced this quarter, enabling the schemes to be evaluated, with interim results published in October 2024.

By custody suite	Delivery 23/24	Delivery since project began
Milton Keynes	32	32
Berkshire – Loddon Valley	42	61
Berkshire – Maidenhead	41	46

**Custody Navigator Volunteers** and their coordinator offer short-term, immediate support and signposting into appropriate services. The scheme has been operational in Abingdon and recently expanded into Aylesbury. Due to challenges in vetted volunteer numbers and achieving a statistically-valid evaluation, the programme will not continue beyond March 2024.

By custody suite	Delivery 23/24	Delivery since project began
Oxfordshire – Abingdon	377	631
Buckinghamshire – Aylesbury	31	31

Read about the latest successes in the case study on [page 24](#).



# Intervention update

# Schools Navigators

The original concept to the Schools Navigators programme began with a model implemented in 2022-2023 and included four schools in Reading and six in Milton Keynes through two providers, Starting Point and SOFEA.

It has since been re-designed to allow for a more robust randomised-control trial evaluation and is being delivered only in Milton Keynes by SOFEA, working with four new schools, chosen for the programme in liaison with the local partnership.

Data from Milton Keynes shows that 70% of children suspended go on to be suspended again, with clean links between exclusion from school and wider vulnerabilities and poor outcomes. In response, Schools Navigators are working to prevent additional exclusion or a reduction in frequency.

The new provision commenced in September 2023 and will run the full academic year through to July 2024. SOFEA has four youth workers trained, each working within a school to provide support to young people referred by the school at the point of their first suspension.

SOFEA provide a six-week programme of mentoring, independent of any of school’s disciplinary process and with a focus upon addressing behaviours, building social skills and providing a trusted adult through a youth work model.

This academic year will provide data to allow for initial evaluation results on the impact which it is hoped will be available by August and in time to influence the delivery of the scheme for the new academic year September 2024 – July 2025.

2022/2023:	Number of young people engaged:	2023/2024:	Number of young people engaged:
Reading (Starting Point)	100	St Paul’s Catholic School	21
Milton Keynes (SOFEA)	104	Leon Academy	10
Total	204	Watling Academy	15
		Radcliff School	13
		Total	59

Read about the latest successes in the case study on [page 25](#).



# Intervention update

## Focused Deterrence

First launching in February 2023, this Milton Keynes partnership project targets those under 25 who habitually carry a weapon/knife and have also committed violent or sexual offences. Primarily implemented by the Milton Keynes Council’s Contextual Safeguarding Team, working with Thames Valley Police.

Working with a cohort now at 45 individuals, two case workers design a tailored support offer, drawing on a range of support. Alongside this, the young person is notified that there will be police intervention if they continue offending despite the level of support they are receiving.

Running alongside is Thames Valley Police targeted disruption and enforcement activity. This takes place concurrently to the support/diversion, but weighted to be felt more should an individual fail to engage with support. The key part of this programme is that it is support offer-first, led by social care, with police supporting, rather than being a police-led, threat-first model.

To date, the programme has shown improvements in multi-agency working, and strong levels of engagement with support. Staff working on the programme report feeling more confident in their approach and multi-agency partners are showing stronger engagement.

A randomised controlled trial will allow us to understand what support offers are most used, as well as whether this type of approach has an impact on crime and behaviour of those in the cohort. The first six-month data will be analysed in February, with results shared with partners.

Key facts	Delivery 23/24
Current cohort	45
Aged 11–17 years	20
Aged 18–25 years	25
Hours of support delivered	216
Support / diversion programmes on offer	36
Positive engagements with support	113 63% uptake



## Intervention update

# Sports & Inclusion interventions

### in partnership with StreetGames

The Thames Valley Sports & Inclusion intervention programme has two components; the first is to support system change and embed sport as a prevention and diversion measure. We host a VRU Sports & Violence Impact Manager post, part-funded by the VRU and by StreetGames UK.



**Chelsea Piggott**

Sports & Violence  
Impact Manager

In this role, Chelsea Piggott supports the delivery of the Thames Valley Strategy for Sport. This includes working to coordinate and support local partnerships and individual sports providers, helping to develop the workforce and enhance existing provision, in particular with grassroots/community-led providers. New Local Sports & Inclusion Partnerships are being established, replacing the previous regional VRU Sports Board to drive this work. Partners are asked to consider how they can participate in these new partnerships and link them back to their wider plans. [Contact Chelsea](#) for further information.

There is also assistance given in applications for new funding, such as the recent Million Hours Fund. There has been success in securing new funding from the Police & Crime Commissioner's Community Fund for a new project to be established in the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead.

StreetGames also undertake the annual Community Sports Audit and the subsequent tools and data insights on sport provision, gaps and disparities will help local response strategies. There will be an number of online workshops to share the findings and discuss next steps, together with an in-person event in March. The [Community Sports Audit dashboard](#) is now available for partners.



# Intervention update

## Sports & Inclusion interventions

in partnership with StreetGames

The second component to the intervention is VRU funding provided to StreetGames for the commissioning of local “Sports Plus” activities that provide positive activities alongside support such as mentoring, education sessions, help with accessing employment etc.



Six local projects have been funded - some commenced in 2022/2023 delivery year and have continued, others began this year. Each project provides an enduring engagement for those referred. While inevitably some drop out for a variety of reasons, new referrals enter as capacity allows.

In 2022/2023, there were four local projects. By the end of March 2023, these four projects had engaged with 127 individuals, split as follows across local areas:

The Project PT (project 1) – Oxford	9
Reading FC – covering mainly Reading	71
Slough	5
Milton Keynes	42

During the 2023/2024 delivery year the number of funded projects increased to six. By the end of December 2023 an additional **81** individuals had joined the projects. In total, the six projects have now engaged **208** individuals since the projects first started. In the majority of cases, they have retained and continue to work with the same individuals throughout this time, giving them access to multiple sport and support sessions through an enduring intervention.

The Project PT (project 1) – Oxford	10
The Project PT (project 2) – Oxford	8
High Wycombe	25
Reading FC – covering mainly Reading	71
Slough	14
Milton Keynes	80
Total:	208

Read about the latest successes in the case study on [page 26](#).



# Intervention update

# Operation Paramount

A partnership between Thames Valley Police and the charity Children Heard & Seen, Operation Paramount is the name of a brand new data-sharing process which is speeding up the offer of support to families affected by a parent being imprisoned, with the VRU also funding a dedicated support worker for the charity.

Families are provided an holistic offer including parenting support, financial advice, navigating the prison system and overcoming stigma and trauma for child and parent. They become part of a wider social network of other families, and receive support in building trust in authorities and policing.

Through this, the whole family – but particularly children and young people – receive protective support to prevent risk of offending or wider vulnerability and improve outcomes.

The Chief Constable has committed to a force-wide roll-out with all areas to deliver the initial support offers. This continues, with only the Local Policing Areas in east Berkshire yet to adopt.

The programme continues to be celebrated as a nationally significant innovation, with nine other police forces exploring how they can adopt these approaches.

The VRU is currently working with the Centre for Social Justice to coordinate a national round-table event to discuss how the approach and its benefits can be adopted elsewhere in the country.

Operation Paramount has led to the following numbers of referrals of individual children for support made by police. Families may also have declined the police offer but then gone on to contact Children Heard & Seen at a later date, which is not recorded.

2022/2023	
Oxfordshire	13
Milton Keynes	10
Slough	2 (area not yet live but circumstances allowed support to be offered)
High Wycombe	4 (area not yet live but circumstances allowed support to be offered)
Total	29

2023/2024	
Oxfordshire	31
Buckinghamshire	2
Milton Keynes	8
West Berkshire	Now live but no referrals yet
Total	41

Read about the latest successes in the case study on [page 27](#).

# Wider programme activities updates

This section provides updates on some of the wider activities being delivered by the VRU's programme team, working with local partners.





## Programme activities update

# ‘Stay True to You’

## Behavioural change product development

Continuing our work with the behavioural change communications agency, Claremont Communications, we are now using the insights from the earlier rounds of research to better understand how we can more effectively engage young people and promote positive behaviours.

Funding via the Serious Violence Duty Burden Grant has been agreed by partners to help develop new approaches and resources, including a standalone public-facing web-hub, new campaign resources and information for young people.

A priority focus is on supporting parents, practitioners, teachers and community leaders to adopt the new approaches and help engage young people to deliver the messages.

Workshops have been held with front-line practitioners and separately with teachers from across the region, helping to inform the approach and resources. Feedback from these sessions to the developing brand and approach has been very positive.

We will be undertaking further testing as the products develop and are open to working with partners on how we can apply the approach locally.

We are aiming for a launch of the website and resources for May, but with scope to build and develop over the coming year.





## Programme activities update

# Berkshire Family Drug & Alcohol Court

The Family Drug and Alcohol Court [FDAC] is an alternative family court for care proceedings. It is specially designed to work with parents who struggle with drug and alcohol misuse, but who will often have other difficulties.

An FDAC is about trying to solve the problems that have led the local authority to bring the parent to court.

The VRU has been working with the judiciary and Centre for Justice Innovation, Children's Services leads across the six Berkshire authorities and with support of the Berkshire High Sherriff to establish a Family Drug & Alcohol Court in the county.

In December, the Centre for Justice Innovation chaired a round-table event involving members of the judiciary, local partners, legal experts, and the Department for Education to discuss the significant impact an FDAC could have, supporting families and individuals with multiple and complex vulnerabilities and harms.

Subsequently, Matthew Barber, Police & Crime Commissioner, has supported the programme with a £50,000 grant to the Centre for Justice Innovation to support partners establish the new court and the processes, which will operate with cases heard at Slough and Reading Family Courts.

A working group has been established, Terms of Reference and partnership vision statements agreed and recruitment is pending for a project lead.



## Programme activities update

# Thames Valley Together multi-agency data-sharing

In November, the programme team concluded participation in the Information Commissioner's Office Regulatory Sandbox scheme, where they carried out a detailed review of the programme and governance arrangements.

The programme received a positive reference from the ICO, who recommended that other areas learn from our work and that they wished us every success as the programme moves on. This development has provided the requested reassurance to three local authorities (West Berkshire, Bracknell and Windsor and Maidenhead), who are now considering the ICOs report and our updated governance documentation.

Development continues on new products. A new VRU Performance Dashboard will help make more visible our collective progress against our own and national performance measures. The new Strategic Needs Assessment product will slash the time it takes to produce these mandated documents in the future and will help the focus on risk and protective factors. The programme team is to begin work on some new products to support processes in Multi Agency Safeguarding, reducing administrative burden and ensuring we focus our collective effort on those who most need our support. Finally, development has begun on a new tool to help areas deliver Focussed Deterrence models; demonstrating TVT's utility as an end-to-end solution helping to deliver and evaluate complex evaluations.

Focus remains on finalising the first live data products due to be put into our production environment during the last few months of this financial year.

**THAMES VALLEY  
TOGETHER**

## Programme activities update

# Pluggin - driving social value funding

Pluggin is a company providing a service to drive social value contributions or sponsorship from private sector business into local voluntary sector projects.

Large public sector bodies which partner with Pluggin are able to use their procurement processes to invite their private business suppliers to sponsor specific local projects as a contribution to social value and impact.

As all public sector organisations must consider social value within their procurement, the Pluggin system is an easy way to meet this, while also helping direct sponsorship toward activity which directly meets the organisation's own aims.

Thames Valley Police has partnered and its supplier base has been signposted towards Pluggin's new Thames Valley Framework, which promotes a range of voluntary sector organisations and projects requesting sponsorship.

We have worked to ring-fence four of the VRU intervention projects currently reliant upon Home Office grant funding and to which we hope those suppliers contracting with Thames Valley Police will now consider sponsoring, as a contribution towards their social value.

A cost-neutral approach, if it is successful it could help provide funding to sustain some of the VRU interventions, including Hospital Navigators, Custody Coaches, Schools Navigators and Sports programmes.

Local partners are encouraged to consider their own approaches to social value, partnering with Pluggin in a similar way to Thames Valley Police opens up the opportunity for greater sponsorship for local projects which seek to prevent violence.



## Programme activities update

# Sustainable training

Since November 2023 the VRU has been developing a number of courses and presentations focusing on awareness of exploitation of children. These programmes of work, detailed below are designed to support our partners in developing, improving and delivering sustainable training products for the future. These will include off-the-shelf training packages, as well as 1-2-1 and train-the-trainer materials.

Given the capacity we have, we will focus on two or three projects at a time, to ensure quality and focus of delivery. If you have a training need/idea [contact us](#) to discuss how the VRU can support.

### Operation Makesafe

The roll-out of a national training package with our own tailoring for the Thames Valley. It aims to improve awareness of child exploitation in the hotel and leisure industry, in particular the use of hotels as venues for sexual exploitation. Our own evidence suggests this occurs throughout the Thames Valley.

We have so far delivered 10 courses, to over 150 Thames Valley Police officers and staff, with four more courses to deliver in January 2024. Taking a train-the-trainer approach, neighbourhood teams will then have the skills to visit hotels to deliver the package to local staff. A “test purchase” operation will then follow, seeking to ensure compliance. We have also worked with The Children’s Society and they will support the visits.

There is a national appreciation of the risks associated with hotels and exploitation and the national project is seeking to influence larger hotel chains at a corporate level.

### Barnardo’s Trauma Informed Awareness training

Utilising VRU grant funds, we have commissioned a number of sessions through Barnardo’s explaining the principles of trauma informed practices and policies. Over 35 events have taken place, training over 700 people from police, statutory agencies and the third sector. These programmes are set at two levels, depending on delegate experience and influence. Feedback has been extremely positive across the partnerships.

Five more virtual training sessions at both levels will be scheduled by the end of March, each with scope for around 30 participants. Dates are being finalised and will publicised shortly.

## Programme activities update

# Sustainable training

The VRU is supporting Oxfordshire with two specific training-related projects. If your local partnership has any training needs or projects which you think the VRU could support you with, [contact Chris Ward](#).



**Chris Ward**

VRU lead for training

### Oxfordshire Youth Girls and Gangs Project

Oxfordshire Youth (OY) are running a two-year, Home Office-funded project supporting young girls aged between 11 and 25. These girls are referred to the project, mainly through schools and social care. The girls are either victims of, or susceptible to gang violence and exploitation.

In partnership with OY, we are preparing 10 half-day programmes to improve awareness across the partnership of exploitation and its links to gang culture. The target audience is education and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations who may come into contact with young people (girls in particular). Whilst the funding for the gang project is focused on Banbury and Bicester, the awareness training will be Oxfordshire wide. Roll-out will be during February, March and April, with a contingency for further training if there is a demand. We are confident in training at least 250 people through the current events.

### Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (OSCB). Exploitation awareness training

We are designing a training and awareness package for professionals across the Oxfordshire partnerships, aimed at those with some experience of exploitation issues. The events will include VRU speakers as well as from those with lived experience, and professionals working with young people. The objectives are to raise understanding and encourage dynamic partnership working.

10 training dates have been set in March 2024. These will be followed by two larger exploitation conferences, co-hosted by VRU and OSCB.

### Future projects under consideration

- Makesafe training/ train-the-trainer programmes for wider leisure industry and taxi drivers.
- Awareness events for parents across TVP education system.

# Case Studies

Success stories from our providers







## Case studies

# Hospital Navigators

Slough Council for Voluntary Services honoured Together As One (Aik Saath) with a #OneSlough award in November in recognition of the public benefit provided by the Hospital Navigator project run at Wexham Park Hospital, part of Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust.

Together As One trains and coordinates community volunteers, working closely with the excellent NHS team at Wexham Park. They are dedicated to offering support at the point most needed, but also a determination to walk with those young people until they are in a better place.

In addition to delivering support in the A&E department during its peak hours, the team can also take out-of-hours referrals from the nursing teams. Volunteers seek to create a more enduring relationship, signposting into support and other services offered by Together As One or local partners.

The award recognised that last year 193 young people were engaged, with over half referred on to another positive pathway of support. This engagement is not short-lived; a large proportion – nearly 40% – have stayed engaged for over three months, improving their outcomes.





## Case studies

# Custody Coaches

Custody Coaches are youth workers who engage those over 18 who are detained in police custody for a violence-related offence.



**Paul Stewart**

Milton Keynes Dons  
Sports & Education Trust

Graham, 23, (name changed) had been arrested on suspicion of possession of a bladed article.

While at a social event at his workplace a so-called friend had also attended and started to cause trouble. They had been drinking and the situation deteriorated, leading to a fight and police being called, with Graham arrested.

Immediately, the consequences of his actions were felt. He lost his job as result. The father of young children and the main earner, he realised the seriousness of the situation.

As his Coach, Paul worked with him on the importance of finding new employment, finding opportunities in the hospitality industry. Graham's experience and positive attitude secured him a trial and the offer of a permanent role.

**Paul explained his approach:**

***"I always try to create opportunities to learn from their situation. With Graham, he recognised how fortunate he was that the incident didn't end more seriously. He was able to reach his own conclusion on those he had been hanging out with, people who were a negative influence on him, and he's now ceased contact, with a fresh focus on the good things in his life."***

**Graham went on to say:**

***"I can't thank you enough for being there for me during these times, as you know this whole situation was new to me and I don't know what I would of done without your help and support. I've got the opportunity to make changes and put this all behind me."***





## Case studies

# Schools Navigators address self-esteem to improve behaviour

Simon Billenness is one of a team of four youth workers at SOFEA who work as Schools Navigators, supporting young people in school who are at risk of exclusion.



**Simon Billenness**

Schools Navigator  
SOFEA

Tyson (name changed) was referred to the Schools Navigators programme after his suspension from school.

His initial meeting discussed the circumstances of his exclusion and wider issues. Tyson had often been disruptive, his behaviour challenging and engagement in lessons and with homework was poor. He was suspended after bringing a toy gun to school.

Gaining his trust and beginning to build a relationship was important. Initially he'd avoid answering direct questions and tell stories to deflect attention. Gradually he opened up and it became clear he was being bullied and excluded from friendship groups. His only ambition was to be able to keep his head down and not be noticed.

Over six weeks of engagement, Simon sought to explore how to build Tyson's confidence, address his negative mindset and discover the positives about being in school. One session focused on his skills, qualities and positive attributes – a tough session for Tyson to overcome his low self-esteem. This provided him a tool, something he can look back on when facing problems and use to help maintain positivity.

In the last session, they reviewed how he had benefitted from the programme.

**Tyson said:**

***“I have learnt to like myself and be at peace with that.  
I focus on the good stuff not the bad stuff.”***

Those who worked with Tyson observed he is a lot more relaxed and confident he could talk openly about his thoughts and feelings. He was now able to maintain eye contact and displayed positive and confident body language. It is hoped that this will have a lasting impact on his behaviour and school engagement.



## Case studies

# Sports & Inclusion interventions

The VRU works with StreetGames UK to commission six local projects which provide “Sports Plus” activities/support.

One of these is led by Slough Borough Council, in partnership with 50-50 Sync Life Skills and a number of local community sports providers.

One young person has been supported with a mentor through the Slough Sports Scholarship programme after carrying a knife. After four months of 1-2-1 sports and life skills sessions, he now regularly participates in gym and football and has now volunteered at a October Holiday Activity Camp to put into practice his new life and character skills.

This camp welcomed 30 young people referred via schools and as at risk of exclusion. They participated in a range of 1-2-1, small group or team activities offering sport but also helped to build their confidence, social skills with peers and adults and helped their communications.

One parent said:

***“My son had been giving me concern as his behaviour worsened and he was making poor choices. Just by participating in the Holiday Camp I’ve seen a change in him with better behaviour and our relationship is stronger. No doubt there will be further issues ahead – he’s easily led – but he’s definitely taken away things from the sessions he participated in, particularly helping him to think again about his choices.”***

Since the camp, her son is back in school full-time and doing well academically. He has recently taken on his first part-time job, demonstrating how his life skills and confidence have grown.

**Slough**  
Borough Council



## Case studies

# Operation Paramount

Under Operation Paramount, data from the HM Prisons & Probation Service is shared into Thames Valley Together and allows individual children left behind by a parent being imprisoned to be offered support by Thames Valley Police.

Kyle, aged 8, (name changed) has been receiving support through Children Head & Seen since June. Their father is currently in prison for dangerous driving, ABH and criminal damage.

There is awareness in the local community, creating a stigma for Kyle, who would get angry when people mentioned his dad. He was struggling with behaviour at school.

Kyle has been receiving sessions from the Support Worker, exploring his feelings, building a trusted relationship with an adult outside his family. Kyle has completed exercises in his social skills – identifying what makes him angry, how to keep control and behave with others. Importantly, he has engaged with sessions with other children in the same situation as him exploring the shame and stigma, helping him overcome these feelings.

Kyle has been led through sessions to focus on positivity, exploring what he is proud of, participating in group activities, making new friends and enjoying being creative.

His relationships at home, his behaviour and school attainment have all improved and he has made new friends with adults and children.



## Case studies

# Wokingham Borough Council Positive Choices event



**WOKINGHAM  
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

In November, falling within the week of Operation Sceptre, Wokingham Borough Council and Thames Valley Police worked together to deliver a three-day “Positive Choices” programme.

Around 300 local school children in Years 7, 8 and 9 from five schools attended the sessions with each day for a different year group. They rotated through a set of workshops exploring different aspects of personal safety, learnt first aid and explored how their own decisions and behaviours can positively influence their lives. A parent information evening was also held, supported by Amanda and Stuart Stephens, parents of murdered schoolboy Olly.

**Cllr Ian Shenton, Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure, Wokingham Borough Council, said:**

*“This event has created a dynamic and engaging experience, taking children out of school to hear from a range of professionals and those with their own lived experiences which they can learn from.*

*“The children participated in these workshops with enthusiasm and recognised the importance of the vital lessons.”*





## Case studies

# Operation Sceptre – week of action champions public health approach

In November, police forces across the country participated in Operation Sceptre, a week of intensified operational activity to tackle knife crime accompanied by education and partnership working.

40 arrests were made for knife offences, with over 1,200 patrols undertaken in known violence hotspot areas. Officers visited those known to be involved in knife crime or violence to give advice, offer support and remind that offending will lead to enforcement.

Through the knife amnesty bins, which include some operated in community areas by local authorities, 337 knives were handed in.

The force – as a member of the Violence Reduction Unit – recognises the importance of education and prevention as the real solution to knife crime. It supported 70 education sessions in schools and community groups.

By working with local Trading Standards teams 110 test-purchases were made at shops selling knives.

The next Operation Sceptre week will take place in May 2024 and then November 2024, dates not yet confirmed.



## Case studies

# Operation Sceptre – week of action champions public health approach

A real success was the shift in focus onto the importance of early intervention, education and diversion, with a range of local partner organisations featuring to showcase how they support young people.

Significant media coverage was generated which emphasised the need to support young people, called on the community to help them feel safe and promoted a wide range of local partners and their work.

Thanks to the following who supported media engagements, hosted TV crews and gave radio interviews, helping to raise awareness and deliver our messaging to local communities:

- Reading FC Community Trust
- MK Dons Sports & Education Trust
- No. 5 – Reading
- Wycombe Wanderers FC Community Trust
- Milton Keynes College
- The Project PT, Oxford
- The Storry Group, Reading
- Amanda and Stuart Stephens, parents of murdered schoolboy Oilly



Week of knife crime and violence prevention begins in Thames Valley



**Knife crime down across Thames Valley, according to new figures**



**More than 100 knives removed from Berkshire streets thanks to police operation**

# Keep in touch:

---

This is the first iteration of the VRU Quarterly Highlight Report and we welcome your feedback.



**If you have any questions  
please contact the core  
programme team via  
[vru@thamesvalley.police.uk](mailto:vru@thamesvalley.police.uk)**



**The VRU website is being updated  
to provide more detailed project  
summaries to accompany this report.  
[www.tvvru.co.uk](http://www.tvvru.co.uk)**



**You can also follow  
us on X/Twitter  
[@TV\\_VRU](https://twitter.com/TV_VRU)**



TACKLING VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITIES