



**VIOLENCE
REDUCTION
UNIT**

DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY FOR
GREATER MANCHESTER'S COMMUNITIES

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24



FOREWORD

Over the past 12 months, the Violence Reduction Unit's (VRU's) partnership with Greater Manchester Police, health, education, probation, criminal justice, the private sector, voluntary, community, and social enterprise organisations, and local communities has continued to go from strength to strength. A real highlight has been the levels of engagement with young people and our communities. Although engagement has been key since the start of the VRU programme, this year more than ever consultation, co-design and co-creation has been at the forefront of our work.

We have also been privileged to witness numerous successes of organisations that we partner with and work alongside. Myself and the Deputy Mayor were lucky enough to visit Bury Defence Academy (an organisation that forms part of the community alliance in Bury) and not only meet the young people who attend the Academy, but see the impressive rows of trophies that they have won as a result of the club's expansion and dedication of staff and partners.

The latest available data shows a continuing downward trend in knife related violence and hospital admissions. In the past 12 months in Greater Manchester, one person aged under 18 lost their life to violence. Of course we are pleased to see these trends but the loss of one young person is still too many and we are continually aware that there is still much more to do. Violence has a devastating impact on victims and their families, as well as local communities, that's why it is vital that we address the underlying causes of violence and work with our partners and communities to prevent it.

In December, the VRU launched the '[Greater than Violence Strategy](#)' – a 10-year strategy to prevent and reduce violence. The strategy is founded on two pillars: preventing violence from happening and responding swiftly and appropriately when it occurs and has five key principles: community-led approach; early and timely intervention; partnerships for change;

equality, equity and justice; and trauma-responsive city-region.

To develop the strategy, extensive consultation with the public, including young people, took place. This allowed us to fully understand the issues and make commitments that communities want to see. Through the Greater than Violence Strategy, we will reduce violence and improve the lives of young people and families across the city-region.

2023 saw many other significant milestones and developments including reaching 1,000 referrals to the Greater Manchester Navigator service, designed to help young people cope and recover from their experience of violence and reduce the potential for further harm. The launch of a parent and carer service in Greater Manchester to support those who may be concerned that their young person is getting caught up in violence and the launch of our primary transitions programme which supports young people as they move from primary to secondary school to mitigate potential risks of or involvement in violence.

Our community-led programmes continued to grow, with new programmes launched in Bury, Oldham, Tameside, Wigan, Stockport, and Trafford, and an additional £1 million in funding provided to be split equally across all 10 boroughs of the city-region, supporting sustainable solutions to reduce serious violence led by communities. We were honoured to be visited by the Prince of Wales and Royal Foundation in November, who, alongside the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Manchester City Council, convened businesses from the private sector to create a dedicated employment, skills, and training programme for young people in Manchester. Greater Manchester's community-led programmes continue to set an example nationally for best practice.

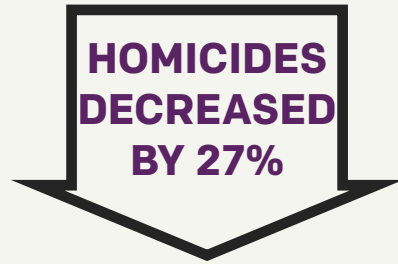
**Damian Dallimore,
Greater Manchester Violence Reduction Unit
Director**

KEY STATS

Between the year ending June 2022 and the year ending June 2023:



**KNIFE-ENABLED
HOMICIDES
DECREASED BY
19%**



**HOMICIDES
DECREASED
BY 27%**



**KNIFE CRIME
DECREASED BY
12.5% ACROSS
ALL AGES**

**KNIFE CRIME
DECREASED BY
13.5%
FOR VICTIMS
UNDER AGE 25**



**HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS DUE
TO ASSAULT WITH A KNIFE OR
SHARP OBJECT DECREASED BY
17% FOR VICTIMS UNDER AGE 25**





PREVENTION

The evidence in relation to preventing and tackling violence is clear: violence is preventable not inevitable. Together we can stop violence from happening and preventing violence makes everyone safer. We will do this by working together to understand and address the underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that an individual, and sometimes their families and friends, will become a victim and/or a perpetrator of violence. We will also work together to enhance and scale up the protective factors that reduce a person's chance of being a victim and/or perpetrator of violence.

Greater Manchester VRU embraces these principles, and seeks to go even further by taking a community-led approach in which residents of Greater Manchester, including children and young people, have a voice in deciding how priorities are identified and how services are delivered. Only by treating residents as experts in their own lives and needs of their communities, will there be the true change needed to deal with the root causes of violence.

COMMUNITY-LED PROGRAMMES

Community-led programmes are now active in all boroughs across Greater Manchester. Analysis undertaken by the Big Data Centre at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), and consultation with communities, enabled the VRU to identify sites across Greater Manchester for community-led programmes to be implemented.

Alliances made up of local voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations ensure provision is targeted at individuals, families, schools and communities of highest need. A community-led violence reduction programme is one of the VRU's flagship projects and ensures communities are involved at a place level to identify priorities, problem solve and direct investment and interventions accordingly.

Case Study - Oldham Community-Led Alliance

In July 2022, four organisations in Oldham were awarded funding from Greater Manchester's VRU to create an alliance to support local young people – Fatima Women's Association, Greenhill Community Sports and Recreation Club, Chai Ladies and Ghazali Trust.

The Oldham programme provides mentoring, youth work and sports programmes for young people at risk of or vulnerable to serious youth violence and exploitation, programmes that empower young females, and projects that engage young people and their parents.

The programme works with young people aged between 10 and 25, and their families, to develop projects to address the underlying causes of violence and build aspirations and opportunities.

When the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester visited the community-led programme in Oldham, Tafreen Akhtar, social worker, said: "I started attending CHAI Ladies group a couple of years ago. It has made a huge impact on my life, my daughters and other mums and their young children who attend the group. It boosts your confidence, mental health, and wellbeing.

"The CHAI group has many projects, including the 'aunty-crime' project, which has been amazing for myself and my children. We have learnt so much about crime awareness and crime prevention and we hope to

make a difference to young people and our community.

"CHAI provides a safe environment for mothers who can express themselves, it is vital for the community, and I am proud to be a part of this group, the work we complete and the outcomes we achieve."



EDUCATION

For the past 12 months the VRU has continued to work to strengthen and bolster the personal development curriculum for every primary, secondary and sixth form student in Greater Manchester, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to ensure students know how to keep themselves and others safe, free from harm and strong in their well-being.

We have supported a number of small-scale projects to meet specific local needs. For example, the VRU has been able to support individuals and small groups of pupils to address specific concerns and improve self-worth and value. This has helped foster positive attitudes and behaviours, many of those who have benefited from this approach have avoided exclusion from school and have improved their attendance. A significant part of our work has focused on specific harms and dangers that affect young people such as knife crime and the sharing of harmful content online.



Case Study - Alison Cope

Alison Cope delivers hard-hitting and memorable workshops about the dangers of knife crime. She speaks from personal experience, having lost her son as a result of knife crime.

In the past 12 months, Alison has delivered 33 sessions in 13 high schools across Greater Manchester, reaching over 1,500 children. Each session provided an opportunity to find out what young people think about knife crime, offer reassurance, bring home the realities that picking up a knife will never resolve a situation, and empower young people to speak up so that support can be provided where needed. Several safeguarding referrals and requests for further support were generated because of the sessions.

Building on her success and feedback Alison will deliver presentations in 30 more schools across Greater Manchester in early 2024.

A school Principal said:

"The staff and the children were deeply moved by Alison's presentation – I have received nothing but positive feedback."

A school Principal said:

"One of my pupils has been through some recent trauma and for the first time he is now speaking about it. He came into my office today to tell me about how he was feeling and to ask for advice - that is all due to the powerful message that Alison delivered."

A young person said: "You came into our school today and I had absolutely no idea that it was going to turn out like that, being honest I thought it would be another boring assembly telling us the dangers and to not carry a knife... but hearing your story from a first-hand account gave me chills."

A young person said: "I've never gotten so emotional, and I hope you have many blessings coming your way, your message definitely stuck with so many people. Thank you for coming in today and teaching us such an important message."

STOP THE BLEED

On the 26 April 2023 Greater Manchester piloted the country's first *Stop the Bleed* day - a collaboration between Greater Manchester VRU and first aid charity citizenAID.

In total, 14 schools from across Greater Manchester took part with training delivered to students in Years 6 and 7. Students learnt how to identify a life-threatening bleed, how to apply pressure, pack a wound, and use a tourniquet.

A total of 1,687 young people were trained to stop a bleed.

Each school was supported by volunteers including doctors, first aid trainers and personnel from the ambulance and fire and rescue services. Students were shown an instructional film and then practised what they had learnt – improvising with everyday items that can be used to stop bleeding. The skills taught could be used in a number of scenarios including a stabbing, an accidental injury, a car accident or animal attack.

Before the training, 140 students completed a survey which revealed that only 10% of young people would be very confident in giving first aid to a person who was bleeding, but 62% said they would like to learn more about how to stop a bleed.

The day resulted in the following findings:

Recognising when bleeding is life-threatening increased from

55% → **88%**

Confidence applying a tourniquet increased from

5% → **92%**

Confidence in stopping bleeding increased from

35% → **90%**

Kate Green, Deputy Mayor for Policing, Crime, Criminal Justice, and Fire said:

"A priority for the Violence Reduction Unit's work is early intervention to prevent situations where a young person is harmed or bleeding because of a deliberate attack. But unfortunately, there are situations when this does happen, and therefore it is vital that young people know how to act."



1,687
YOUNG PEOPLE
TRAINED TO
STOP A BLEED



In 2024, Stop the Bleed day will be rolled out across the city-region.

PARENT AND CARER SUPPORT SERVICE

Launched in October 2023, the Parent and Carer Support (PACS) service provides support for parents and carers who have concerns about their child. They may have noticed a change in their child's behaviour, and/or, suspect that their child is involved in violence, criminality or potentially being exploited. The project was created in response to feedback obtained by parents and carers from the Navigator Programme and other parenting groups, where issues around education, neurodiversity, risky behaviour, feelings of isolation, and a breakdown in relationships were identified as potential areas of concern. Both the Navigator Programme and the PACS service are delivered by the charity OasisUK.

The PACS team offer one-to-one support for parents and carers, bespoke action plans, peer-to-peer support, advocacy, third-party counselling options, and a therapeutic online 10-week course based on the principles of non-violent resistance known as 'Encounter'. Encounter aims to improve 'parental presence' by focusing a parent/carer on their behaviour rather than their child's, helping to rebuild relationships.

Since launch:

- **Over 100 parents and carers have been supported, with referrals received from eight of the 10 boroughs**
- **The team have attended 121 professional meetings with parents and carers**
- **113 one-to-one sessions have been conducted**

Over 50% of those engaged in the programme have opted to attend 'Encounter' – the programme has been hailed by participants as transformative, providing a support network for parents and carers who feel particularly isolated.

The PACS team have been successful in building effective relationships with families quickly with a non-judgemental approach.

Advocating for parents and carers during school and professional meetings has been hugely beneficial as both parent and third-party service are supported.

One headteacher reported that all previous meetings with a parent resulted in escalation, he described the PACS involvement as 'working wonders' for the situation. One parent who had not left the house for a year after her son's death, received counselling sessions. After four weeks she reported that she had been out shopping and had opened her curtains and was delighted with her progress.





BLOCKS

BLOCKS is a child-centred, strengths-based, trauma-informed programme providing one-to-one support for young people as they transition from primary to secondary school to mitigate potential risks of involvement in or connection with violence.

Co-designed with young people, parents, and primary school teachers and staff, the programme includes 10 primary schools from across Greater Manchester and is delivered by Salford Foundation.

BLOCKS completed its first 12 months in operation in October 2023. During this time, mentors worked in both the school environment and the community, during school holidays, providing structured support, mentoring and social skills development.

173 young people have been supported via BLOCKS since launch.

Over the course of the year, the need for a mentor to support some young people with the transition into year 7 was identified. As such, 15 young people who moved into year 7 in September 2023 retained access to a mentor. As of November 2023, in addition to the 15 year 7 pupils, there are 43 year 5 pupils receiving support through BLOCKS, and 53 year 6 pupils. The remaining 58 young people were supported to exit the programme.

Case Study

Carl was referred to BLOCKS due to concerns about his involvement with a local group and the impact of his dad's criminal history. As sessions progressed, Carl became more engaged, allowing us to establish a trusting relationship where he feels comfortable discussing his emotional well-being and behaviour inside and outside school.

Carl has experienced violence, with his father currently serving a prison sentence for domestic abuse and GBH. Witnessing these events has affected Carl, influencing his school attendance, education, and behaviour. Carl has shared details about his dad's arrest and why he was arrested. Witnessing his dad's arrest for GBH was particularly distressing, although he struggles to express negative feelings. He only likes to share his positive opinions and memories about his dad. Visiting his dad in prison is difficult, and Carl talks about his feelings during our sessions, especially since he feels unable to talk to his mum about dad.

Carl has also been involved with a local group using him in the process of carrying and selling drugs in the local area. This resulted in receiving threats which caused a lot of distress. His behaviour, including targeting vulnerable peers for fun, has led to isolation and potential exclusion from school. Concerns about his attachment style and reluctance to leave his mum during school breaks have been observed since primary school. Despite challenges, our sessions offer Carl a safe space to navigate his emotions and experiences, requiring ongoing support for his behaviour, emotional well-being, and relationships.

STREETDOCTORS

StreetDoctors trains young people across the UK in the physical and psychological consequences of street violence and develops their knowledge, confidence and willingness to support themselves and others. After working with the VRU on several partnership projects, StreetDoctors were commissioned to pilot the Stepwise programme at HMP Hindley. The programme has a focus on youth engagement, training, and social action and was developed with HMP Hindley, Merseyside and Cheshire Prison Group, and the proposed group of young participants.

The sessions included first aid on bleeding and what to do if someone is knocked unconscious, a nationally recognised HSC First Aid at work qualification, mental health and emotional wellbeing, communication skills, peer education and facilitation training.

All participants identified they have lived experience in relation to street violence and were able to share their experiences to support the co-design of new StreetDoctors first aid training activities.

Participants had the space to explore their personal style, skills and what made effective communication, with many highlighting the importance of listening, not judging, not reacting too quickly, and ensuring everyone understands the full picture.

As a result of the course:

- 60% highlighted their self-esteem had increased
- 90% identified they had improved their communication skills
- All participants passed the assessment for the course which resulted in accredited certification
- All participants highlighted they had gained additional knowledge and skills in lifesaving
- All the young adults highlighted they were more likely to engage in an activity which supports their community/prison

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UNITY RADIO

The partnership between the VRU and Unity Radio's New Talent Academy, aims to raise awareness of serious violence and knife crime and build aspirations through a series of conversations led by young people.

The partnership sees young people, aged 13-17, join one of three nine-week programmes, to discuss issues relating to serious violence that affect them in a series of workshops, before creating content to be aired live on Unity Radio's Next Generation Youth (NGY) show. The station has an average of 30,000 young listeners from across Greater Manchester every week.

Young people travel from across Greater Manchester to attend radio-training workshops and deliver a live radio show on Unity Radio. This includes music, features and information on areas and issues that affect young people. By creating peer-to-peer education and social scaffolding, they are helping to increase resilience among young people while safeguarding the vulnerable and at risk.

Watch young people from Unity talk about their experiences: [We Have Our Own Unity Radio Show - Next Gen Youths \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

In the past 12 months, over 30 young people have successfully completed the nine-week programme. Referrals to the programme come from complex safeguarding, CAMHS, youth justice and social services.

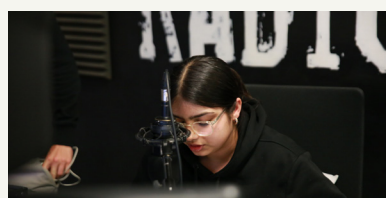
All participants:

- Completed the course and received an Arts Award qualification
- Actively engaged in research, planning and delivering live radio shows
- Demonstrated growth on personal goals related directly to learning new skills
- Shared plans for future aims beyond the course – education, employment and social
- Showed an improved understanding of how to reduce/recognise and report violence
- Were comfortable to discuss themes connected to violence within both group settings and with Unity Radio staff
- Were able to collaborate with each other and build good working relationships

Case Study

Catherine – Parent

"It helped Joel to be able to mix with other young people and gain confidence in talking and presenting. Joel has developed better coping skills and built on his maturity. It surprised me how easy it was for him to present. It has given him an invaluable insight to radio and presenting but also meeting new people and dealing with challenges. Joel was committed and that says a lot. Sometimes the group dynamic was challenging but this was discussed with the team and appears to have been resolved."



**UNITY
RADIO**



Case Study

Danny O’Keeffe, Complex Safeguarding Social Worker, Bury Children’s Services

“David was able to meet other creative diverse young people and build new positive relationships. David has not been getting up to no good in the community and he appears to be behaving at home now and coming in on his curfew. I was surprised that he stuck to it and completed it. He needed encouragement on the first session, however after that he loved it. David is creative and experienced people creating music there, this has given David new skills within creating a radio show, and writing music. David said all the staff members are sound, and he really enjoyed going. Overall, he really liked it and for a young person with ADHD, all the staff members were able to engage him. I think it’s an amazing project and really helps to engage the young people, with educating them on violence from the VRU without glamorizing it to the young people. I have recommended this course to a lot of other social workers.”





RESPONSE

When a violent crime is committed, it is imperative that there is a swift and robust response from policing, health, and the Criminal Justice System and that those experiencing violence are protected.

Youth Justice Services in Greater Manchester operate under 'Child First' principles and continue to develop innovative programmes to engage young people and challenge them to change their offending behaviour. For example, Salford Youth Justice Service has developed a particularly impressive programme of violence desistance which has delivered good outcomes with a particularly challenging cohort of young offenders.

OPERATION VENTURE


Operation Venture – Greater Manchester Police’s dedicated team for tackling violence, particularly that involving young people – recently celebrated 12 months of success. Operation Venture works closely with the VRU to refer young people into positive engagement programmes and prevent violent crime from occurring. The team organise weapon sweeps; carry out proactive patrols across hotspot areas; conduct arrests in relation to violent incidents or other relevant offences; stop and search individuals when there are concerns about possible violence and criminal behaviour; engage with the community and assist divisional response teams with grade one calls.


The work of the group continues behind-the-scenes and in the classroom, with officers also taking part in crime prevention and community events to help build trust and direct engagement and prevent violence before it can escalate.





Since launch, the team have achieved the following:

 **452**
arrests

 **942**
intelligence submissions to help investigations


 **119**
weapons seized including knives and firearms

 **168**
weapons sweeps of key locations to search for disposed items

 **426**
total positive stop and searches

 **£250,000+**
cash seized

 **190**
partnership referrals to educate offenders

 **218**
disruption visits to prevent crime from escalating

NAVIGATOR PROJECT

Launched in May 2021, the Greater Manchester Navigator Project works with young people aged 10-25, to help them to cope and recover from their experience of violence and assist with access to local support networks to prevent the potential of further violence.

Initially rolled out in four hospitals across Greater Manchester (Royal Bolton Hospital, Salford Royal Hospital, Manchester Royal Infirmary and Manchester Royal Children's Hospital), due to the success of the project, scope has been expanded to include referrals from North West Ambulance Service (NWAS) and community referrals.

Navigators work with young people to identify areas in their life that they would like to change, create a support plan, and refer them to local services and act as their advocate.

Since the launch of the programme, **over 1,000 referrals have been received, with 77.5% of young people accepting the offer of support.** The number of referrals has significantly increased year on year, with the largest proportion of referrals now coming from the community.



Case Study

"Sean, aged 15, was referred into the project from hospital. During the initial assessment Sean spoke about his carrying weapons, drug use and involvement in organised fights between two local groups. Sean found school really difficult and subsequently left with no qualifications. The relationships with his family had broken down due to his behaviour and during the time we were supporting him he became homeless.

Over 12 months we have been able to support him with positive activities, qualifications and rebuilding his family relationships which has included finding suitable accommodation with an extended family member. During the initial assessment Sean had mentioned he really loved playing football so the Navigator linked him in with a local grassroots team. Having the structure of attending training and playing games on Saturday morning really helped to begin putting in a bit of structure to Sean's week. Building on this we supported Sean to enrol in a 12 week programme with Street League, the programme is based on sports and employability skills. Through this he gained a certificate in football coaching and a Sports Leader Award. Sean showed huge commitment throughout the 12 weeks taking two buses and a train each day to attend the course four days a week. Following this course he was put forward for football trials at a professional club and has been successful in gaining a place in the team. As part of this he has also been enrolled on an education programme which will give him a BTEC qualification in sports coaching."

ACES AND TRAUMA

Adversity and trauma can impact on all aspects of a person's life, often affecting a person's ability to engage fully in society. We also know there are links between adversity and trauma and violence. However, this negative response is not inevitable and adversity and trauma are also preventable. In 2019 the Greater Manchester Reform Board set a ambitious plan to become an Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and Trauma Responsive system.

Since then, a shift is starting to happen across the city-region to ensure:

- A coordinated population approach to reduce children, families and individuals' exposure to ACEs and Trauma.
- A focus on responding to children and adults who have been impacted by ACEs and Trauma to mitigate the consequences of ACEs and Trauma.

The VRU is part of the Greater Manchester ACE and Trauma Response network, which proactively engages with partners and members of the community. **Since 2019, the VRU has given over £800,000 to Trauma-Responsive Greater Manchester (TRGM)**, a multi-agency and whole-system programme that provides a range of interventions and opportunities, invests in the VCSE sector to help shape public services, and engages with communities.

This has contributed to the following outcomes:

- Identified system leaders across the 10 Greater Manchester localities
- Developed a Community of Practice
- Secured funding from the Home Office
- Created a training programme for a wide variety of staff
- Commissioned 11 third sector providers to deliver and develop resources
- Recruitment of an evaluation partner
- Successfully hosted a multi-agency conference in January 2024 for 550 people

An ACE and Trauma Responsive approach is already embedded in many programmes and ways of working. For example, training in trauma responsive approaches has been delivered to paramedics, paediatricians and GPs across Greater Manchester and work is progressing to embed this within future education programmes for health care professionals. The VRU is also working closely with Greater Manchester Police to ensure ACEs and Trauma are embedded throughout their child-centred policing strategy.



NEXT STEPS/LOOKING AHEAD

Over the course of the next 12 months, the VRU will continue to work with partners, communities, and young people to build on the success of the first five years of work. In the spring, plans will be published for the implementation of the Greater than Violence strategy which will accelerate the work of the VRU and partners to prevent and respond to violence, including fast streaming our work with schools and colleges and our commitment to make Greater Manchester a trauma-responsive city-region.

The VRU will strive to continue to reduce violence and show young people in particular that there is an alternative and offer hope and aspiration for a future where they can achieve their goals and live safely in our city-region.

