



**VIOLENCE
REDUCTION
UNIT**

DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY FOR
GREATER MANCHESTER'S COMMUNITIES

Annual report 2024-25



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Foreword

This year, perhaps more than ever before, we have faced stark reminders of the critical nature of our work as a Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). The tragic events in Southport in July 2024, resulting in the loss of life of three children and many more seriously injured, as well as the murder of Prince Walker-Ayeni in April 2024 here in Greater Manchester serve as a sobering reminder the scale of the challenges posed by serious youth violence, both locally and nationally.

We continue to have a really strong partnership response to these issues, and we are doing more than ever before to prevent violence and intervene at the earliest possible stage when crime of violence occurs. The VRU's partnership with Greater Manchester Police, health, education, probation, criminal justice, the private sector, voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise organisations, and local communities has continued to grow and develop. We continued to oversee the delivery of the Serious Violence Duty across Greater Manchester, convening specified authorities to ensure that we have a comprehensive understanding of violence in our communities and that our responses are evidence-based and effective. We continued to be privileged to witness numerous successes of organisations that we partner with and work alongside, without whom our work would not be possible.

The latest available data shows a continuing downward trend in homicides and hospital admissions for injuries sustained during assaults. In 2024, the homicide rate in Greater Manchester was 8.1 per million which is a decrease of 35% compared with 2023. This rate of homicide has fallen below the UK average for the first time since 1990. Of course we are pleased to see these trends, but the loss of one life is still too many and we will continue to work with our partners to drive these numbers down even further. 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.

Our community-led programmes flourished in 2024. We are incredibly proud to have programmes live in every borough of the city-region, delivering groundbreaking work that puts communities at the heart of service delivery, setting priorities, problem solving and making decisions about funding. Whether it's a boxing club, arts intervention, mentoring or work with parents, the CLPs continue to deliver for young people in communities across Greater Manchester. The programmes demonstrate the Mayor's commitment to delivering a 'Live Well' ecosystem across the city-region tackling the root causes of poor health and inequality, rather than only treating their consequences. We were really pleased to enter into a partnership agreement with Royal Foundation to set up a dedicated employment, skills, and training programme for young people, delivered through our outstanding community-led programme in Manchester delivered by the Peace Together Alliance, supporting delivery of the Mayor's ambitions around MBacc.

We place a high value on our relationships with all education settings in Greater Manchester. This year, we launched a pioneering online 'Education Hive' resource for schools to interact with the VRU, offering multiple levels of engagement depending on the individual needs of schools and colleges. To launch this, we hosted a Primary School Summit in October 2024, which provided a platform for over 200 senior school and system leaders to come together to share good practice and to build solutions around some of the most pressing issues that primary schools currently face around youth violence.

Evaluation of our BLOCKS programme (providing social skills training to children in Years 5 and 6 and manage the transition for those children into Year 7) by Manchester Metropolitan University highlighted statistically significant data, underscoring the evidence base for the programme's effectiveness.

We're really proud of BLOCKS as one of our flagship interventions, and will be looking to spread and scale learning from the programme across the education system as we enter the next year of our delivery.

Looking ahead to 2025, we continue to engage with the new government to aid delivery of their ambition to half knife crime over the next 10 years. We really welcome this commitment and share the Government's ambition in delivering it. We are exploring opportunities for Greater Manchester to become a trailblazer

region for the 'Young Futures' programme, with ambitions to open a Hub in our city-region in 2025. Meanwhile, we have scoped priorities around 'Prevention Partnerships' with the government. Home Office officials took a particular interest in the work of Greater Manchester's PIED approach to identifying young people upstream, and we will look to support the government in setting up local Prevention Partnerships throughout 2025.

**VRU Director,
Damian Dallimore**



Key stats

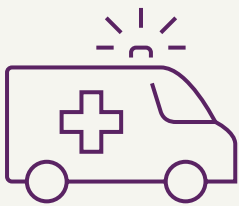
In the year ending December 2024, compared to year ending December 2023:



Hospital admissions due to assault (all ages) decreased by 5%



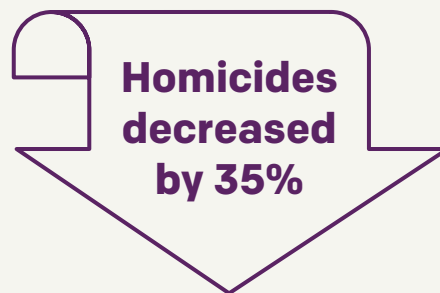
A&E attendances due to assault decreased by 2%



Ambulance callouts due to assault decreased by 17%



Knife-enabled homicides decreased by 54%



The rate of homicides across Greater Manchester was at the lowest rate since 1990, and Greater Manchester recorded the second lowest number of homicides of its most statistically similar force areas – only Northumbria recorded fewer.

In 2024, our partnership with Greater Manchester Police (GMP) continued, with their Operation Venture team maximising activity across the city-region. Rates of GMP recorded knife crime increased by 16% in 2024. GMP are doing an excellent job in identifying people carrying knives, committing serious offences

and taking knives off the streets and as a result we've seen improvements in health outcomes and reductions in homicides which really tells us that what we're doing is working; fewer people are presenting at hospital, or calling an ambulance, as a result of our partnership work to reduce serious violent crime.

An increase in police-recorded crime in our city-region against these downward health metrics reinforces that GMP are doing their job to keep the public safe, whilst our partnership activity is reducing key metrics in respect of knife-enabled injury.

Greater Than Violence Strategy

The VRU's 10 year 'Greater Than Violence' strategy was published in December 2023. The strategy is based on five principles which set out how violence will be addressed across the city-region and the commitments that organisations, agencies, and partners will come together to deliver. These principles are applied across the two pillars of the strategy: prevention and response. It is crucial that violence is prevented from happening in the first place and is responded to effectively by police and criminal justice partners in instances when it does occur.

The five principles are:

1. **Community-Led Approach:** Ensuring communities are at the heart of problem-solving and decision making to prevent and reduce violence.
2. **Early and Timely Intervention:** Invest in and promote services which take an early intervention approach to individuals at risk of violence and associated harms.
3. **Partnerships for Change:** All partners and communities across Greater Manchester will come together to find solutions to prevent violence.
4. **Equality, Equity and Justice:** Reduce the impact of violence on communities that are disproportionately affected by it.
5. **Trauma-Responsive City-Region:** All partners will work together across Greater Manchester to become trauma responsive so we can prevent childhood adversity and trauma to mitigate harm across the life course.
2. Education settings across the city region are engaged with the VRU, providing supportive environments and programmes to positively and actively engage young people.
3. Our city-region's local services are flexible and responsive across the system, reflecting the needs and assets of children, young people and their families across the life course.
4. Violence prevention and response is a key priority for our partners and communities.
5. The voices of those with lived experience, families and communities are at the heart of our decision making.
6. Our city-region's VCFSE sector is strong and sustained, with a stable funding model and strong foundations for future delivery.
7. We make decisions and assign resource innovatively and based on international, national and local intelligence.
8. Violence across the city-region is reducing, as evidenced by key outcomes such as police recorded violence with injury and hospital admissions due to assault with a sharp object.
9. We have embedded behaviour and culture change across organisations and within our communities that responds to trauma and childhood adversity.
10. Disproportionality in the criminal justice system is reducing and perception of fair treatment is increasing.

Greater Than Violence Strategy: 12 Vision Statements. In 2024, the VRU produced an implementation plan with partners across the system and VCFSE sector centred around 12 vision statements. These are:

1. Children and young people feel safe, valued and motivated about their future.
11. We have a good understanding of digital engagement and respond to the needs of young people, communities and partners.
12. Key outcomes demonstrate a reduction in violence across diverse communities in all parts of the city-region.



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.

The 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.

Education

The VRU is committed to supporting GMCA's wider aims to lead the way in education by creating pathways and opportunities for all children in Greater Manchester. The Mayor's manifesto is clear: every young person in Greater Manchester deserves access to the best opportunities, preparation for future success, and the best possible outcomes that exceed expectations. Therefore, the VRU has accelerated and deepened its engagement across schools and colleges in GM throughout 2024. This activity cuts across all five principles of the VRU's strategy, seeking a reduction in serious violence and wider harms amongst our children and young people.

Primary School Summit

On 3rd October 2024, the VRU held a Primary School summit to follow the first held in 2021. The objective for the summit was to provide a platform for senior leaders to come together to share good practice and to build solutions around some of the most pressing issues that primary schools currently face around youth violence. We invited local representatives from Greater Manchester Police, our 10 local authorities, health and fire services, ensuring the event could be used by education leaders to network and build on local partnerships throughout the day. Based on consultation with primary schools prior to the event, we selected three key themes for the day: online harms, parent and carer relationships, and student self-worth and aspirations.

Keynote speakers included the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Barnardo's Chief Executive Lynn Perry MBE. The focus of the Mayor's input was student self-worth and aspirations, setting out his vision for an education system in Greater Manchester that raises the aspirations and self-worth of our young people from primary school age, supported by the Deputy Mayor. Meanwhile, Lynn Perry spoke at length about online harms and the impact of online behaviours on young people. To conclude the event, the VRU launched its new flagship online resource for engaging with schools and colleges across the city-region – the 'Education Hive'.

Education Hive

The Hive is an ambitious project in which we invite all education settings in Greater Manchester to partner with the VRU. Various levels of engagement are offered; schools and colleges have the option to simply stay informed of the VRU's programme of work and relevant information in the violence reduction space, to attend event events hosted by the VRU, such as the Hope Hack and the Primary School Summit, or to have an active role in shaping the VRU's programme of events to ensure that it meets the needs of schools and colleges in Greater Manchester. A prototype online platform to seamlessly connect schools into the VRU has now been launched, with approximately 150 schools and 100 system partners across Greater Manchester signed up so far, with ongoing engagement underway to increase this reach as we move through 2025. [Schools and colleges can go to the Education Hive's webpage to sign up and join.](#)



MBacc

The Mayor's 2024 manifesto prioritises a future where all young people can access high-quality education, training and skills that prepares them positively for their next steps - education that works for them and their potential. It's about an offer that's in the best interests of all young people, especially those who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs. This aligns with the second vision statement of the VRU's strategy implementation plan and crosscuts all principles of our strategy.

A key element of this vision is the MBacc, a curriculum pathway designed to provide a set of employer-driven, work-based experiences – hands-on learning that prepares young people to thrive in real-world environments. It focuses on numeracy for the workplace, soft skills like teamwork and communication, digital competence for navigating a tech-driven world, technical expertise tailored to industry needs, and personal development that builds confidence and ambition. This approach is about creating adaptable, resilient individuals who are ready to contribute to Greater Manchester's seven growth sectors: health and social care, digital and technology, engineering and manufacturing, construction and the green economy, financial and professional services, education and early years, and creative, culture, and sport. In so doing, we envisage key reductions being achieved in wider harms amongst children and young people in our city region, including

serious violence, by making them feel they have a stake in their future and in the future of the city-region they call home.

'We Can Work It Out' Pathways to Employment Programme with Royal Foundation

The VRU is supporting delivery of the Mayor's ambition to open up a clear pathway from school to high-quality jobs. We know that education and employment outcomes are still poor despite our support, so we want to create bespoke pathways for the children and young people that the VRU is working with to help them re-engage in education or secure apprenticeships/training/employment. Therefore, work is being piloted by the VRU in south Manchester (working with Hideaway and the Peace Together alliance who deliver our community-led programme in Manchester) connecting children and young people with opportunities. In 2024, we signed a grant agreement to receive £50,000 additional investment from the Royal Foundation to fund a youth employment, skills and training programme in this area. Key to this is the involvement of private business, who are providing support via work shadowing, apprenticeships, and employment opportunities that might otherwise be beyond reach of young people in Moss Side. This is a three-year initiative to design and test an approach to improve the life chances of young people by creating inclusive routes to developing skills and employment opportunities.

VRU Reading Project

One of the commitments under the 'Early and Timely Intervention' principle of the VRU's strategy is "the VRU will work with education settings to find creative ways to engage children and young people – including those with special educational needs – in positive activities to improve attendance and exclusion rates." Sitting under our wider education work, the VRU commissioned a pilot reading project across three schools in Greater Manchester in 2024. Data from the #BeeWell survey shows that too few young people read for pleasure. We are aware from DfE and Ofsted reports that too many are struggling readers whose reading skills are at an early stage. We know that the quality of young people's writing and their quality of life improves when they read more and read often. The more pupils are widely read, the better their outcomes socially and individually, as well as academically. All of this contributes to a reduction in children's involvement serious violence and wider harms.

Therefore, the project aided primary schools with readers (fiction and non-fiction) that would help them talk about and reflect upon those values which align with the VRU – for instance, making choices, decision making, taking responsibility, community and teamwork and treating others as they would wish to be treated. The VRU identified three primary schools that have expressed a firm interest in choosing a selection of fiction and non-fiction books that pupils could read, borrow and take home, and read with an older family member, that had titles and content linked to choices, responsibility and consequences.

Key outcomes sought by the VRU were:

1. A high percentage of targeted disadvantaged pupils report an increase in reading for pleasure, measured through surveys or reading records.
2. A high percentage of targeted pupils regularly read at home with a family member as a result.

3. Character Immersion: All targeted pupils participated in a 'Day in the Life' experience, where they role-played as a book character, demonstrating awareness of responsibility and consequences.
4. A high percentage of targeted pupils improving their reading age within the programme's duration, measured by engagement in literacy in their school's personal development curriculum.

Alison Cope Sessions



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 2024-25, Alison will have delivered over 30 sessions in high schools across Greater Manchester, reaching over 2000 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. As a result of safeguarding referrals and requests for further support generated at her previous sessions, we have worked in partnership with Oasis UK to ensure Navigators are present at every session in 2024/25 to assist with disclosures.

BLOCKS



A core education offer within our Early and Timely Intervention principle is 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 two years in operation in October 2024. During this time, mentors worked in both the school environment and the community during school holidays, providing structured support, mentoring and social skills development.

Hundreds of young people have been supported via BLOCKS since its launch. Over the course of 2024-25, as in the previous year, the need for a mentor to support some young people with the transition into year 7 was identified. percentage.



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 his sessions, as 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.

Community-led Programmes

Community-led programmes are now active in all boroughs across Greater Manchester, fulfilling principle 1 of our strategy. Analysis undertaken by the Big Data Centre at Manchester Metropolitan University, 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, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) 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 – Wigan Alliance

The Worsley Hall Alliance is made up of Wigan Athletic Community Trust, Leigh Leopards Foundation, 1Message, Smart Body Sports and Wigan Youth Zone, delivering a youth club, sports provision, outreach and mentoring.

All partners have been engaged with the community developing positive relationships, forging exciting opportunities and creating new experiences for the young people of Worsley Hall. The mentoring offer for Worsley Hall is made up of three different strands, including group and one-to-one mentoring, universal delivery outside of school, outreach work and family support and training sessions. The mentoring offer for Worsley Hall is made up of three different strands, including group and one-to-one mentoring, universal delivery outside of school, outreach work and family support and training sessions.

What professionals and participants have had to say:

"I always make sure I am in school on a Wednesday so I can do the session with Mick and Carlie, they treat us like adults and listen to what we have to say, we have learnt some really helpful stuff."

"We have seen a positive change in the group both in behaviour and outlook and have noticed for a small number of pupils that struggled with self-control that they have been able to control their aggression a lot better which has resulted less exclusion from lessons or school in general. For one pupil who was a constant truant from school it has engaged her so well that her truanting has reduced by nearly 50% since the course started and beyond the end of the programme."



PIED (Prevention, Intervention, Education, Diversion)

The PIED process was formed in response to young people being named as suspects in crime that remained potentially invisible to diversionary services to reduce their risk of further offending. The objectives are to:

1. Ensure every child in Greater Manchester that is named as a suspect is treated as a child first and suspect second.
2. Promote a trauma-responsive approach to offer enhanced support for young people and families.
3. Reduce harm and prevent the likelihood of re-offending.

PIED Process

- GMP representative runs Cognos data for their district for juveniles named as suspect on crimes.
- This data is then triaged to ascertain whether the young person fits the PIED criteria, which is to see if they have been named as a suspect on two crimes within the last 12 months.
- The triaged data is sent to partners and checked against local systems. This will look different on each district as to who has access to these systems and is available to take responsibility for this role.

This will allow checks to ascertain whether the child is 'visible' to services already. If the extent of visibility is such that they were known to services previously or superficially (e.g. referral through care plan but closed without work being completed) but no one is currently working with them or their family, this would count as 'invisible' for these purposes.

- The young person is discussed at a panel to decide which would be the best service to engage the young person. This could be children's services, Early Help, substance misuse services, domestic abuse services, mental health services, mentoring services etc.
- Consent is then sought from the young person to refer them. This can either be sought by police or partners. Many districts have found consent is more likely to be given using a partner. If consent is declined, the young person is not referred. This is a consent-based service.
- PIED is not an out of court disposal – it is an early intervention. Therefore, it can be used for all outcomes, including NFA and charge, and can be used where a child has been RUI or is on bail.
- 3,027 children across Greater Manchester were referred to a PIED panel between January and November 2024.



Parent and Carer Support Service (PACS)



Launched in October 2023 as a key intervention crosscutting across multiple principles of our strategy, 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 500 referrals have been received from all 10 Greater Manchester boroughs**
- **Over 1,000 triage calls resulting in some form of intervention or signposting.**
- **Over 330 face-to-face appointments and professional meetings and over 130 further online professional meetings.**
- **Over 2,200 over-the-phone support contacts (telephone calls and text messages)**

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.

Case Study

Parent of a Year 5 Child who had multiple suspensions from school: "Our family are having a tough time and the support from everyone has kept me going knowing I am not alone. I want to thank you for your kindness when I needed it the most and took the time to come see me and my son when we needed it the most it meant the world to me."

School Advocacy and Encounter: "Thank you for supporting me especially at school meetings, for listening to me and helping to guide me. I don't have much support but it's nice to know you're there."

"We have been shouting for help since he was 5 years old, and we can honestly say that you and the Encounter course are the only one that has helped. You listen and do what you say you are going to do. We would be lost without you."





Community Sport



2024 was another strong year for delivery of the VRU's community sport provision by Streetgames. Projects are located across the

city-region, but particularly focused in Bury, Bolton, Manchester, Tameside and Rochdale in areas of highest need. These sport-based interventions continued to engage hundreds of young people throughout 2024.

The young people involved in the work are aged 10-17 years, have presented with a wide range of needs and vulnerabilities, are at risk of entering the criminal justice system and require secondary level intervention and support. Each young person has been informally or formally referred into the programme. This may have been through schools, youth justice, police (including via PIED) or local community, family or self-referral.

Throughout 2024, the VRU's commission with Streetgames allowed locally trusted community sports based organisations to continue to provide a wide range of sports based activities (multi-sport, boxing, gym, combat sports, football and outdoor water based activities) along with 'Sport Plus' opportunities that are rooted in developing and promoting 'Pro-Social behaviours' and 'Pro -Social identity' in young people. The young person is at the centre of the intervention and provision and is grounded in Child First principles. These Sport Plus

activities typically involve mentoring both one to one and small group sessions, opportunities for volunteering, leadership development skills and opportunities to gain practical skills and qualifications.

Each young person has benefitted from a community sport based secondary level intervention that combines intentionally designed community sport and physical activities with additional opportunities that we term 'Sport Plus'. Throughout the work young people surveys have seen positive shifts in socio-emotional scores such as showing happiness, well-being and increased activity levels and a reduction in anxiety scores.

Projects from the application stage through to the delivery cycle have been underpinned, guided and supported through key mechanisms – a Theory of Change, Audit Tool and VRU community sport strategy visions support through visits and community of practice collaboration and development to not only support young people involved in the project but also the organisations themselves to develop and sustain their work. Use of the audit tool by partners increased throughout 2024.

This evidence-based approach, data capture and learning are key facets and add a richness and value to the work and this helps shape, shift and evolve community sport sector thinking and practice.

StreetDoctors

Building on the successful partnership with StreetDoctors delivering bespoke programmes in alternative education provision and HMP Hindley, the VRU continued the partnership throughout 2024, developing innovative programmes and offering easily accessible courses via the VRU co-designed 'StreetDrs Saves Lives' app. The VRU has funded over 2,920 app licences which have been distributed to 23 schools and several youth organisations across Greater Manchester.

The VRU and StreetDoctors are currently mobilising delivery of a Young Leaders programme, which will train 20 young people engaged with the Youth Justice services. Upon completion of the course, the participants will have improved communication and leadership skills to inspire their peers through social action and

improved their confidence and capability to take an active role in community education. They will become accredited and will deliver first aid training to their peers, supported by StreetDoctors volunteers. The intention is to develop this programme across the city-region, and it has attracted match funding opportunities with Islamic Relief and the Hiscox Foundation.

StreetDoctors has chosen to host their annual showcase event in Greater Manchester in June 2025 due to the significant partnership development and variety of programme delivery.

StreetDoctors evaluate all their programmes, and engagement with young people in Greater Manchester in partnership with the VRU has achieved:



67%

of the young people worked with highlighted they were actively worried about street violence in their area

82%

of the young people demonstrated they had increased knowledge and skills

83%

had increased confidence to act in an emergency situation using the learnt First Aid skills

82%

of young people we worked with said they would actively recommend our training to their friends

68%

had increased their willingness to act in an emergency situation

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 involving young people – recently celebrated a further 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 identify habitual knife carriers as well as monitor knife, robbery and violent cases in the criminal justice system; 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:



251
arrests



598
intelligence submissions to help investigations



59
weapons seized including knives and firearms



168
weapons sweeps of key locations to search for disposed items



271
total positive stop and searches



£30,050
cash seized



134
partnership referrals to educate offenders



161
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. This serves as the VRU's key response intervention cutting across our strategy commitments to facilitate partnerships for change and to develop a trauma-responsive city region.

The programme was initially rolled out in four hospitals across Greater Manchester (Royal Bolton Hospital, Salford Royal Hospital, Manchester Royal Infirmary and Manchester Royal Children's Hospital), then expanded to include referrals from North West Ambulance Service (NWAS) and the community.

Expansion has continued in 2024 to include a specialist navigator at Wythenshawe Hospital supporting female domestic violence victims, and a pilot scheme with three custody navigators based at North Manchester Police Custody Suite to provide support for young people arrested for violence related offences. Since July 2024, 78 young people in custody have been referred into the programme.

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 2,000 referrals have been received. The number of referrals has significantly increased year on year, with the largest proportion of referrals now coming from the community.



Case Study – Amy

Amy was 15 when she was referred by the Custody Suite to the Oasis Navigator Project. Amy had been arrested and was facing multiple charges including possession of an offensive weapon, violent disorder, and assaulting an emergency worker. Following her arrest, Amy developed anxiety and fear around her involvement in the legal process and her future. The Navigators supported Amy and her family, providing guidance throughout the criminal proceedings and offering emotional support during court hearings. Amy was issued a 10-month referral order, with Navigator continuing to assist her in engaging with violence reduction work, respecting boundaries at home and school, and improving her educational engagement by supporting her transition into a new pupil referral unit and from this Amy has expressed her desire to return to mainstream school. Amy's mother was also referred to the PACS team and has been engaging with her own support worker.

Through ongoing support, Amy has demonstrated a commitment to change, expressing a desire to turn things around and avoid further involvement with the criminal justice system.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and Trauma Responsive System

Adversity and trauma can impact 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 an ambitious plan to become an Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and Trauma Responsive System.



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

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 VCFSE sector to help shape public services, and engages with communities.

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 has continued to work closely with Greater Manchester Police throughout 2025 to ensure ACEs and Trauma are embedded throughout their child-centred policing strategy.



Systems Change

The VRU in Greater Manchester has always tried to achieve its aims over and above solely focusing on the breadth and depth of its commissioned interventions. Since its start in 2019, the VRU has tried to affect change from within the system itself, as it believes that lasting systems change is vital to preventing and reducing serious violence both locally and nationally. The VRU is staffed with seconded partners from across the system, including a consultant A&E doctor specialising in paediatric health, a former Greater Manchester Director of Public Health, a local authority Head of Youth Justice, two local authority Youth Justice leads, a senior probation officer, a former headteacher, senior police officers and a VCFSE lead.

The contribution of these colleagues to reducing serious violence is not measured purely by what they provide to the VRU itself; equally important is what they take back to their organisations when not working for the VRU. This means working to change perceptions and attitudes across those organisations from within to ensure systems work more effectively and proactively to tackle and reduce serious violence. For example, the consultant A&E doctor has led and coordinated on data capture training with A&E staff at Manchester Royal Infirmary to ensure data fed through TIIG (Trauma Injury & Intelligence Gathering) is captured more accurately first time, has facilitated the spread and scale of this training across other NHS trusts in the city region, and has run events across their NHS trust highlighting the risks of adultification of young people when presenting in A&E. Our Community Sports lead has also ensured the inclusion of our sports programme in a national systems change evaluation led by Loughborough University.

In 2024/25, we have also convened a number of new, in person quarterly networks to bring together figures from across the sector in both the Health and VCFSE fields to spread and scale its agenda within organisations across the city-region beyond purely those that are commissioned – or partnered with – by the VRU. This was also achieved by our Primary School Summit held in 2024, which laid down a marker for the education sector in GM in terms of how we wish to accelerate

and deepen our partnerships with schools and colleges moving forward. Since the summit, the launch of our Education Hive has continued this systems change-oriented engagement, with the number of schools using the Hive continuing to increase week by week.

Finally, we are currently commissioning implementation and impact evaluation of the VRU model within the Greater Manchester system, both as a retrospective of VRU delivery to date and prospectively aligned with our 10 year strategy. This will seek to understand how the VRU has affected change across the system in the local landscape.

This will take several streams of work:

- A retrospective look at the shape and development of the VRU over a defined period, including desk-based review of documentation and delivery over past period, and headline outcomes measures to date.
- Mapping of the development and contents of the ten-year strategy and implementation plan, plotting the people, policies and organisations engaged in the delivery of the strategy.
- Review and update of the overarching VRU Theory of Change to account for learning and changes to delivery over the past five years.
- Identifying the availability of baseline data and outcomes data for the future tracking of the strategy and VRU model.

Forward Look

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 six years of work. The 12 vision statements guiding our strategy implementation plan will accelerate the work of the VRU and partners to prevent and respond to violence, including deepening our work with schools and colleges and our commitment to make Greater Manchester a trauma-responsive city-region.

The VRU has been proactive in its engagement with government, sharing its ambition to halve knife crime – and violence against women and girls (VAWG) – over the next 10 years. In 2025, the VRU will continue to lead on the education strand of Greater Manchester’s Gender-Based Violence Strategy to retain a thematic focus on violence against women and girls (VAWG) within wider VRU priorities.

The Mayor and Deputy Mayor wish for our city-region to be a trailblazer in respect of the government’s proposed ‘Young Futures’ hubs, with proposals being scoped to deliver a trailblazer Young Future site in our city-region. This would bring together statutory and voluntary services in strengthened local partnerships for a place-based approach, enabling all young people to live safe lives where they feel loved and cared for, healthy and happy, and have power and purpose. We believe that the VRU has affected an ecosystem across Greater Manchester in which partnerships across the system and VCFSE sector are mature, meaning delivery of any trailblazer site could begin at pace.

Scoping is underway to develop ‘Prevention Partnerships’ in every district of our city-region. As part of our engagement with the new government, it is clear that they place an increased focus on earlier and earlier identification of young people at risk of perpetrating serious violence. Prevention Partnerships would identify those at risk at

the earliest possible opportunity and refer them into support and interventions aimed at reducing the likelihood of them becoming involved in crime and violence. Prevention Partnerships may be asked to implement a form of PIED (as pioneered in our city-region) more widely in 2025/26 and VRUs may be asked to oversee this, possibly with additional funding to do so. The VRU stands ready to implement such arrangements across our city-region, with planning already underway with our 10 local authorities to do so. We will also support the government in its more immediate priorities concerning reductions in knife-enabled robbery, working with Greater Manchester Police to identify what works and continue to convene partnership responses to the issue as we move through 2025.

We will continue to expand our understanding of what works to reduce serious violence. Our proposed systems change evaluation commissioned via Manchester Metropolitan University will feed into the VRU’s Data, Evidence, and Intelligence framework being developed by our public health registrars and research team, which will guide our approach to data and evaluation through the next phase of the VRU.

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.

