

Youth violence intervention unit (YVIU)

A youth violence intervention unit (YVIU) set up to target under 18s, to prevent involvement in serious violence using police officers, police community support officers (PSCO), and specialist youth workers.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Diversion
Topic	Violence (other) Child abuse Offender management
Organisation	Northamptonshire Police
HMICFRS report	PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy; An inspection of Northamptonshire Police
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Region	East Midlands
Partners	Police Government department

Key details

Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	September 2023
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people

Aim

The aim of the YVIU is to divert children away from criminality and becoming involved in serious violence.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the YVIU are to:

- reduce the number of children from being involved in serious violence and wider criminality
- improve collaborative working to intervene with high-risk children at the earliest opportunity
- improve relations between the police and children to encourage the reporting of exploitation
- enhance the support offered to children who have a parent receiving a custodial prison sentence or who are open to integrated offender management (IOM)

Description

Northamptonshire Police conducted an analysis of the top 350 most serious offenders in the county. They found there was a sharp increase in the number of occurrences of children aged 12-16 years involved in criminality, with specific links to serious violence. In response, the force set up the YVIU to target and prevent children in Northamptonshire from becoming involved in criminality or being targeted as a victim.

The teams within the unit have different roles in helping to divert children away from criminality. The YVIU uses a combination of police and specialised youth workers to divert targeted children away from criminality.

Three teams form part of the YVIU:

- early intervention team
- engagement team
- disruption team

Early intervention team

The early intervention team consists of police community support officers (PCSOs) who primarily work with children under the age of 12 years. The team are trained to manage complex families and provide one to one intervention work. This can include:

- regulating emotions
- problem-solving
- creating life roadmap journey
- fostering positive relationships with the aim of diverting the young person away from criminality

The team are currently receiving face-to-face enhanced training for trauma therapy which is delivered by the charity Children Seen and Heard.

The PCSOs also offer support to children and families where a parent has received a custodial prison sentence or is open to integrated offender management (IOM).

The team deliver knife crime awareness assemblies and the police education (Pol-Ed) programme in selected schools. The aims of the sessions are to teach children and young people about the law, policing, and safeguarding.

Engagement team

The engagement team works with 8-17 year-olds who actively choose to engage and work with the YVIU. The team consists of youth workers and adverse childhood experience (ACE) support officers. The team is seconded from the office of police, fire and crime commissioner (OPFCC).

The team collaborate with the other two teams on high-risk cases. They plan and co-ordinate disruption activities to create engagement opportunities through arrest and multi-agency working.

The awareness work the team undertakes includes:

- knife interventions (risks, ripple effect, and consequences)
- child exploitation (risks now and effect later in life)
- managing and understanding emotions
- healthy and unhealthy friendships/relationships
- exploring adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and their impact
- parenting support and workshops (such as a child exploitation webinar)
- education

The work is wide-ranging, and staff will seek opportunities bespoke to the individual as necessary. Staff will attend meetings, complete custody visits, contribute to the weekly triage process, and support wider policing operations.

Disruption team

The disruption team focus on under 18s identified as high risk. These children are identified through intelligence, crime analysis, referrals or via the force's tasking processes. This cohort do not want to engage with the YVIU, and the team adopts a focussed deterrence approach.

The purpose of the team is to:

- manage risk
- react to teachable moments
- manage the intelligence picture
- encourage the young person towards the engage in receiving support

The team received enhanced face-to-face training on criminal exploitation to enable them to identify upstream exploiters and use disruptive methods on individuals where justified. Officers work to plan and coordinate disruptive activities through arrest, multi-agency working, and responding to teachable moments (for example custody and hospital visits).

As of May 2025, the disruption team will staff a 24/7 on-call process to ensure the YVIU can respond to all teachable moments, as well as being contactable for parents and professionals in the event of self-referral.

Reduced risk

When a risk has been identified as reduced (through a dedicated framework), the cohort member will be reviewed for de-selection by a supervisor. The de-selection codes reasons include:

- code one – positive outcome
- code two – lack of meaningful engagement
- code three – length of prison sentence
- code four – move out of county
- code five – managed by another team
- code six – other
- code seven – risk below threshold

Overall impact

Qlik Sense software is used to provide real time management information. Qlik Sense enables police to create specific applications for departments. The YVIU has created its own application, which shows the effectiveness of the work being undertaken with young people. This is seen in the number of occurrences the young person is involved in. Due to time constraints, a full analysis is yet to be completed, but early indications suggest that there is a link between the department becoming involved with a child and a reduction in their occurrences.

During the period from January 2024 to May 2025:

- 704 referrals have been received into the YVIU
- the average “case open” time sits is approximately 100 days

As part of the Qlik Sense application, the force is able to look at individual demand for cohort members six months prior to being accepted, versus six months post-deselection. Comparisons are then drawn to assess effectiveness and desistance from offending or victimisation. The data is not sanitised and includes individuals who went on to commit further offences, or who did not meaningfully engage. This was to ensure that the force did not “hand pick” successful cases only.

- 85 cohort members have been de-selected to allow the force to run data for six-months. The data revealed that for the entire YVIU:
 - There was a reduction of overall occurrences by 38%. This includes non-crime data such as public protection notices (PPNs) and domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessments. This amounted to a 32.2% reduction in police costs and a 37.3% reduction in harm costs.
 - When applying crime occurrences (as suspect/offender or victim), there was a reduction of 37% volume occurrences.
 - When applying suspect or offender occurrences, there was a reduction in 47.1% overall occurrences, a reduction from 170 to 90. This was linked to a 37.8% reduction in police costs.
- 15 cohort members have been de-selected to allow the force to run data for 12-months. The data revealed:
 - For the Engagement Team, there was a reduction in overall occurrences by 49.0%, reducing from 98 occurrences to 50, linked to a 67% reduction in police costs.
 - For crime only occurrences, the force saw a 61.1% reduction in occurrences.
 - For suspect/offender only occurrences, the force saw a 74.4% reduction in occurrences, linked to an 81% reduction in police costs.

A young person, aged 16 years, provided feedback which sums up the help and support that the intervention can provide:

“You listened to me and helped me fix all the things that were going on for me. I was doing mad things and involved with people I now know were exploiting me. You showed me how to safely get away from drugs and weapons without any people coming after me and now I'm living happily. When I come back to Northampton, I know how to stay safe. I have moved away from Northampton now but if I didn't work with you, I would still be involved in drug dealing and maybe even have been stabbed or dead. Thank you for the help.”

Learning

- Using specialist workers from the OPFCC to undertake 1:1 work with families means that the children and families can have a non-police officer contact, who can understand their needs better and improve engagement. Having a broad approach to prevention and targeting different cohorts has helped to tackle issues.

- Many of the problems experienced by the children are related to parental influence. Managing families' complex needs is a challenging area of policing.

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