

## **LEICESTERSHIRE SAFER COMMUNITIES STRATEGY BOARD**

**11<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2020**

### **LSCSB UPDATE: THE VIOLENCE REDUCTION NETWORK, OPCC**

### **THE MENTORS IN VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMME (MVP)**

#### **Background**

1. The Violence Reduction Network (VRN) was established by the Police and Crime Commissioner, Lord Willy Bach, in September 2019 following receipt of a Home Office grant. Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) are one of eighteen areas across England and Wales that were invited to apply for Serious Violence grant funding to set up a Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). The core function of these Units is to “offer leadership, establish a core membership and, working with all relevant agencies operating locally, provide strategic co-ordination of the local response to serious violence”. There are several expectations attached to the grant including investing in and evaluating evidence-informed interventions aimed at preventing and reducing serious violence.
2. Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) is one of the interventions which has been brought to our area by the VRN. It is an example of primary prevention in that it aims to prevent the onset of violent behaviour but uniquely, it can also be deployed across all levels of prevention including within offending populations. This paper provides an overview of MVP, a progress update and plans for sustainability.

#### **The Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) Programme**

#### **Background**

3. MVP is a peer-led leadership and bystander programme developed in the United States by Educator, Dr Jackson Katz. Harnessing the power of peers, it trains young people as Mentors and equips them with the confidence, knowledge and skills to identify and speak out against bullying, abusive behaviour and physical violence. The programme recognises the progressive nature of violence and the importance of increasing understanding and acceptance of a broad definition of violence rather than one that just focuses on a physical act. Accordingly, it aims to tackle the beliefs, attitudes and culture which can give the message that violence within about outside intimate relationships is acceptable. MVP is inclusive and draws on a bystander approach. Mentors aim to influence, motivate and empower all young people to play their role initially through their role as friends. Ultimately MVP promotes the healthy social norms and culture which are known to prevent violence.

4. The programme has been running in secondary schools across Scotland for ten years and is now being implemented in at least five areas across England and Wales. There have been several qualitative evaluations of MVP in the USA and Scotland which have led the VRN to conclude that this is a promising violence prevention strategy worthy of testing and evaluating in local secondary schools. The reported impact in Scotland is summarised below<sup>1</sup>:
- Students reported increased awareness of the issues related to violence, gender-based violence and bullying.
  - Staff reported an increase in pupils who are ready to alert them to safety concerns, from a fight brewing, or a friend self-harming, to someone carrying a sharp object into school.
  - Pupils and staff related examples of pupils intervening on the school bus or in the community when they have witnessed violence or bullying. Pupils reported that they are aware of a variety of ways that they can intervene when witnessing behaviours that are detrimental to wellbeing.
  - Both pupils and staff referred to an improved ethos within school and a reduction of barriers between older and younger pupils. Mentors and staff identified a positive impact on mentors' confidence and the enhancement of a range of skills such as team-work and presentation skills. Staff suggested that leadership was a key quality developed by involvement in the programme.
  - Following staff training in MVP, there was a significant increase in the number of staff who felt that they have the necessary skills to educate others about gender-based violence. There was evidence of increased awareness of issues, an increase in those who believe that bystanders can make a difference, and a rise in the number of staff who thought that they would challenge gender-based violence.
5. With several VRU areas now implementing MVP, it is likely that the quality of the evidence-base will grow through further evaluation.

### **The Programme**

6. Once a Head Teacher/Principal has indicated an interest, senior school leaders are invited to an introductory session (webinar) after which they confirm if they intend to proceed. Training is then provided to the staff within each school who will be both overseeing the programme and training mentors with a follow-up support session to consolidate learning. A further session is offered to school leads to discuss and plan for implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/practice-exemplars/mentors-for-violence-prevention-mvp-an-overview>

7. School staff then undertake a selection process for Mentors within their school. Usually Mentors are older students from year 10 or 11. Schools are encouraged to identify a diverse range of Mentors and particularly those young people who may not usually apply for such a position. These students are then trained as Mentors and are provided with resources including a bystander toolkit and lesson plans to promote discussion amongst friendship and peer groups. Lesson plans cover different scenarios relating to issues such as sexting, name-calling, knife carrying, cyber-bullying but always follow the MVP's bystander framework which provides options for responding to these issues and enables young people to develop and practice this within a safe and supportive environment. Alongside delivering specific sessions with their younger peers, Mentors also take on a wider role within the school acting as a point of contact for concerned students and modelling safe and appropriate responses to real-life situations. A wider benefit of MVP is that Mentors will not only have a positive impact within their school but also within their wider community as the Mentors' learning (and that of their peers) cascade into other settings and eventually into adulthood.
8. Staff and Mentors from each school also become part of a wider local MVP Network to offer peer support and ensure on-going development of the programme.

### **Local Progress**

9. The VRN has commissioned Graham Goulden from Cultivating Minds to deliver the training and follow-up support during the first two years of implementation. Graham also works in an advisory capacity to ensure programme fidelity and to assist the VRN in mobilising and implementing the programme across LLR.
10. The first wave of schools completed their training in November 2020 and are now implementing the programme within schools, albeit slightly adapted due to social distancing restrictions. These schools are:
  - Newbridge High School (North West Leicestershire) CSP;
  - King Edward VII Science and Sports College (North West Leicestershire);
  - Castle Rock High School (North West Leicestershire);
  - Redmoor Academy (Hinckley and Bosworth);
  - The Winstanley School (Blaby);
  - Keyham Lodge (City);
  - Judgemeanow (City).

Other partner agencies, including staff from the police, youth service and community safety teams have also undertaken the training so they can support local schools.

11. Wave one staff will continue to be supported including through monthly peer support sessions facilitated by the VRN and supported by Graham Goulden.

12. An advert for the second wave of schools has been circulated and an introductory webinar arranged in December 2020. The VRN's MVP lead is also directly approaching schools in priority areas to promote the programme. The training for wave two school staff and partners has been scheduled for late January 2021. We are anticipating that 12 schools will start as part of wave two. A further two waves of schools are planned for 2021/22.
13. Multi-agency webinars have also been organised to increase awareness of MVP and mobilise support and commitment to the wider and longer-term plans (as outlined below). This includes a virtual event hosted by Mrs. D. Taylor CC on Thursday 17 December 2020.

### **Sustainability and Future Plans**

14. From 2021/22, we plan to transition from depending on an external trainer to developing a virtual team of MVP champions and trainers from local partner agencies, including schools. This received endorsement at the last Violence Reduction Board. Champions will attend a train-the-trainers programme delivered by Graham Goulden. The VRN central team will continue to co-ordinate MVP locally including recruitment of schools, offering peer support sessions and developing new material to be used within the programme. Sufficient funding has been secured for 2021/22. An evaluation plan is in the process of being drafted which will include both a process and impact evaluation.
15. Although the VRN is currently supporting the implementation of MVP in secondary schools, the programme is transferable to many other settings including further and higher education, youth groups, sport clubs, custodial settings and the workplace. Decisions over how we extend MVP to other settings will be made by all relevant partners and through the Violence Reduction Board.

### **Key Risks**

16. There is a risk to programme fidelity and this is particularly the case when sharing material with a wide-range and high volume of partners. This is being mitigated through controlling access to training and implementation material and providing clear leadership and co-ordination through the VRN central team.
17. There was initial concern that MVP may duplicate other school based programmes. To date, we have not found that this is the case but importantly, the decision whether or not to implement MVP is led by the school itself following an introductory webinar. This assists in managing this risk through schools being able to make an informed judgement on whether or not MVP is the right fit for their school.

18. We recognise that MVP will be implemented in schools to varying degrees of success. Furthermore, Covid-19 is likely to hamper successful implementation. This risk is being mitigated through offering additional follow-up sessions and support where required.
19. Our plans for sustainability will require partnership support and resource (in staff time) which may be undermined by operational pressures. So far, we have received an excellent response from partners and will formulate the details of the sustainability plan in partnership so all risks are identified and mitigated as far as possible.

### **Recommendations to the Board**

20. It is recommended that the Board:
  - Notes the content of this report;
  - Considers attending the Introduction to MVP webinar on Thursday; 17 December 2020 for further information.

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