

Knowledge Exchange Network: street interactions

The Knowledge Exchange Network held its seventh meeting on 5th October. This session looked at street interactions and explored the resources needed for the police to better solve problems, build trust and relationships, and reduce harm for young adults in contact with the criminal justice system.

D/Chief Inspector Lynne Colledge (Northumbria Police) presented Northumbria's [street triage service](#). The service is a collaboration between the NHS services and the police. The service was established to prevent the unnecessary detention or arrest of those who have mental health issues and who would be better served elsewhere, away from both police and the criminal justice system. The service works closely with suicide prevention officers and mental health workers to support people being released from hospital.

Caroline Chapman, Gateway Project Support Sgt (Hampshire Constabulary) then presented [Project Gateway](#), a police out of court disposal for young adults aged between 18-24 years-old who have committed low level offences and have accepted responsibility for the offence. The intervention is delivered through an adult conditional caution. The caution has three conditions which are to engage with a Gateway navigator, attend two Linx sessions and to not reoffend.

The Network then split into workshop groups where the following themes were discussed.

Information sharing and referrals

Members discussed how the key to successful street engagement with young adults sits within effective information sharing, in particular with health and social care colleagues. Linked to this was the importance of a simple and quick referral process. While members said that GDPR and consent can make it hard to speed up the process, it needs to be as quick as possible so that the moment of intervention isn't lost for the young person. This is particularly important considering young adult's maturation: "*young people want quick wins, not support three months down the line*". This can result in a wasted opportunity to support young adults and may add to their feelings of distrust and reluctance in accepting support.

Supporting young adults

Members from Kent spoke about their involvement with the [Forward Trust](#) who work with 18–25-year-olds in local prisons who are victims of county lines related offences. They teach the young adults to sustain stable relationships and teach positive coping skills which take a pro-social approach. Members added that they were interested in focusing on young adult women who are involved in county lines as they are often exploited and used as the "*secret weapon behind all of this*." Members were keen to hear more about how to support this group.

Members emphasised the importance of building strong relationships with young adults, particularly in schemes where there is a single link worker such as a navigator or a case manager. While a young person may not be able to access the right service immediately (due to funding, capacity etc), the relationship can take up that space whilst the right services are found for them.

Underpinning all of this was ensuring that the intervention is targeted at the right person. For some young adults committing low-level offences, extensive and long-term support is necessary but for others, for example someone in possession of a small amount of cannabis, an intensive intervention may not be right. Instead, it may pull them further into the justice system and cause more harm than good. Members were keen to stress that a needs-based assessment of people entering custody would ensure interventions are given to those who really need it.

Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences

Members discussed the [US-based diversion scheme, LEAD](#), which takes a harm-reduction approach to diverting people who commit low-level offences driven by trauma, poverty, substance misuse or homelessness. Members felt this scheme was successful due to the fact that the trauma of the person who offends is considered alongside the victim's trauma. They appreciated how the programme balanced individual harm with the harm done to communities by making sure people are held accountable for their actions but doing this alongside support and recognition of the underlying drivers of offending. Additionally, the outcomes of the programme are large-scale and longer-term which members felt was missing from schemes in the UK.

Despite this, members felt that discussions around the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) were becoming more common. There now needs to be an increased *“understanding and mindfulness about the role protected factors can play alongside this.”* Equally, members stressed that ACEs do not have to determine a young adult's pathway which is why a strengths-based approach, such as LEAD, is useful to reach positive outcomes.

Police training

Members discussed the training required to enable the police to engage effectively with young adults at street level. They said that there is still a substantial percentage of police who are only interested in criminal justice routes rather than prevention and interventions. This may be due to their exposure to negative behaviour on the streets which has created an enforcement-only mindset.

Members said that tackling this requires working with other agencies to gain new perspectives on the issue, working collaboratively and having specific training around trauma and how to help de-escalate difficult situations without using enforcement – *“this might turn the lights on for people.”*

Partnership working

Members discussed how the police work with partnership organisations to ensure young adults have a successful route into support. In Kent there are Geographical Taskforces who work in particular communities, such as deprived areas with high criminality. They use targeted approach to work in these areas, involving the relevant schools, support services and councils.

Members also spoke about the 'Bystander intervention' and the learnings from [Scotland's VRU programme 'Mentors in Violence Prevention'](#). This training aims to empower students to safely speak out against all forms of violence from rape and sexual harassment to bullying and abusive behaviour. Kent's VRU are working with the Scottish VRU to understand and implement a 'Bystander Intervention' approach to encourage children and young people to take ownership of their actions and decisions.

Working with young adults to develop better street responses

Members from Kent Police discussed how they had worked with young people to develop new language around groups of young people on the streets. While police might be tempted to use terms such as 'gangs,' young people highlighted that just because they are in a group, it doesn't mean they are in a gang or should be labelled as a criminal. Instead, police in Kent are adopting the term 'street-groups' to remove the automatic enforcement mindset.

Members from Essex spoke about their [Listening Project](#) which focuses on speaking to young people about their experiences and an analysis of what could have been done differently. These learnings are then put back into service delivery. They have also delivered [Positive Action Roadshows](#) to engage with children and young people and listen to their views about policing in the community.

While some young people only have very negative experiences of the police either through their own arrest or the arrest of family members and friends, they feel that community events can be key to restoring these relationships.

Members discussed Crimestoppers's youth programme [Fearless](#), a youth service aimed at 11–16-year-olds which develops effective anti-crime resources for young people and their families. By delivering these materials to teachers, youth workers and community leaders, Fearless aims to help future generations navigate a safe path to adulthood. Members liked the anonymity feature of Fearless, where young people can report a crime or concerns around it anonymously in order to break down barriers around 'snitching' and repercussions.

The next Knowledge Exchange Network meeting will take place on Tuesday 16th November at 3-5pm and will be on the theme of technology. [Click here to join the meeting.](#)

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