

BEDFORDSHIRE

# VERU

VIOLENCE & EXPLOITATION  
REDUCTION UNIT

# QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT

Q1

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2024**

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Louisa Glynn

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## OUR STORIES

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# FOREWORD

I can't quite believe we're already waving goodbye to warmer days and brighter evenings, as well as presenting you with a progress report for our first quarter!

There is no other way to start this report then by extending my gratitude to our partners for their support and continued dedication to our shared mission of reducing violence and exploitation across the communities of Bedfordshire.

The challenges we face in our county are complex, somewhat unique, and often deeply rooted, but the commitment seen across the

network to safeguard our young people and empower them to make sound choices is something I count a privilege to be a part of.

I am pleased to update on the significant strides we have made this quarter. From the development and expansion of our intervention programmes to the strengthening of community partnerships, the groundwork that has been laid is crucial as we continue to address the root causes of violence in our communities. There has also been an extended period of reflection, as we joined partners in welcoming the Knife Angel to Luton – a sobering reminder of the wider impact of knife crime but an underlined message of hope with every surrendered blade used in the iconic ironwork. To mark the angel's arrival, we were also honoured to inspire a charity single by Click Arts Foundation. Featuring the United African Association Dancing Drums, the rendition of Falling Angels by David Essex will be used to raise money for both organisations and further support their reach to young people.

It is also my pleasure to formally welcome our new team member Louisa Glynn, who joins as the VERU manager and with a wealth of experience in crime prevention, having spent more than 30 years in policing. I hope that you will all join me in congratulating Louisa on this appointment and will no doubt have already had the opportunity to connect.

Finally, I couldn't finish without congratulating Chantelle Olaiya, our Communications Team Leader, who was recently presented with the Innovation Award at Bedfordshire Police's Annual Force Awards for her incredible work leading on our Just Drop It, anti-knife crime campaign. This award is not only reflective of Chantelle's exceptional talent, but the continued rigour and compassion that she brings to her work. We are all very proud!

As we continue forward into quarter two, I am excited for the opportunity to listen to the voices of the young people we serve, through the development of our new VERU Youth Voice Forum, and to see the continued positive impact of our collective efforts in the months ahead.



“

I am thrilled to join the VERU and work on impactful and meaningful projects that will support and enhance the lives of young people across Bedfordshire. Having previously worked to tackle serious crime and youth violence both strategically and operationally, and I am passionate about reducing the carrying and use of knives, along with reducing the exploitation of young people. Partnership is so crucial in everything we do, and I will be working hard to bring a variety of organisations and key partners together to support each other and make a difference.

**Louisa Glynn, Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit Manager**



Q1

# OUR IMPACT

Everything we do at the VERU is underpinned by impact, analysis and data. This approach ensures our activities are appropriately allocated and effective in achieving their goal.

Total no. of young people engaged with Q1 - 2024/25

2753

Q1

# AT A GLANCE

Young People reached



A&E Navigators **28**



Sports & Diversion **92**



Custody Navigators **47**



TREE Project **2184**



Schools Navigators **29**



Triage & Diversion **205**



Social Skills **158**



Counselling **10**

Q1

# OUR REACH

The VERU operates a pan-Bedfordshire service ensuring young people across the county have equal access to diversionary activities, targeting intervention and developmental support.

**Bedford  
Borough**

**126**

**Central  
Bedfordshire**

**227**

**Luton**

**2390**



Q1

# OUR INTERVENTIONS

Investing in different communities and agencies to tackle exploitation themselves is a key part of what we do – and a hallmark of our VERU Village approach.

Supporting our young people through

 Intervention & Diversion

 Sports & Activities

 Education & Empowerment

 Community Safety Partnerships

 Therapeutic Support & Mentoring

 Reducing Offending

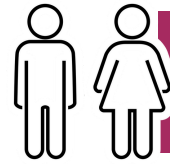


## Changing Lives in Custody (CLiC)

Reactiv8 will have a visible presence in police custody suites in Bedfordshire to engage with 18-25 yr olds whilst in police detention. They will seek to establish reachable moments and re-focus behaviour, helping them make positive changes in their lives. Ongoing mentoring, signposting and support relating to education, training and employment will be available upon release.



**47** Referrals  
**Bedfordshire Police**



**Male - 44**  
**Female - 3**

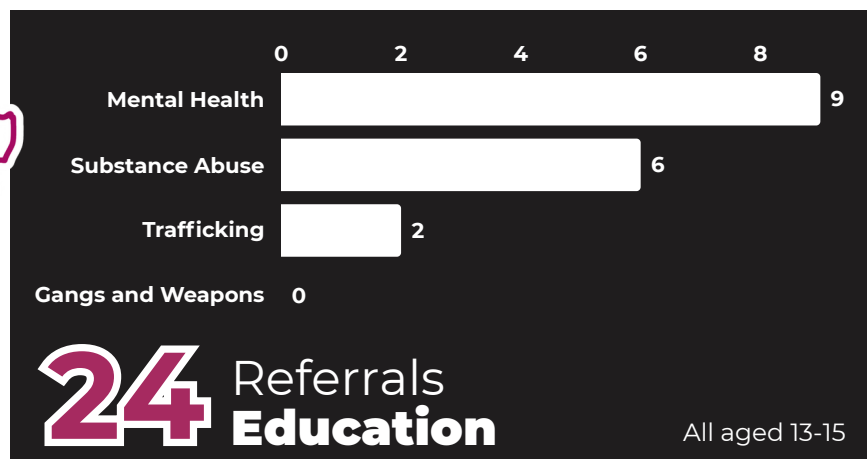
\*The above has captured some data which refers to a vulnerability factor/s and may exceed the number of referrals reported as an individual may have more than one vulnerability

## Schools Navigators

Wingman mentors will allocate navigators to work within six schools across Bedfordshire providing an eight week, one to one trauma-informed social skills programme to children at the first point of disengagement from education. Navigators will provide support to young people referred by teaching, pastoral staff or families to equip the young people with the tools to develop positive behaviours.



**Bedford Borough - 0**  
**Central Bedfordshire - 24**  
**Luton - 0**



**24** Referrals  
**Education**

All aged 13-15

**Male - 11**  
**Female - 13**

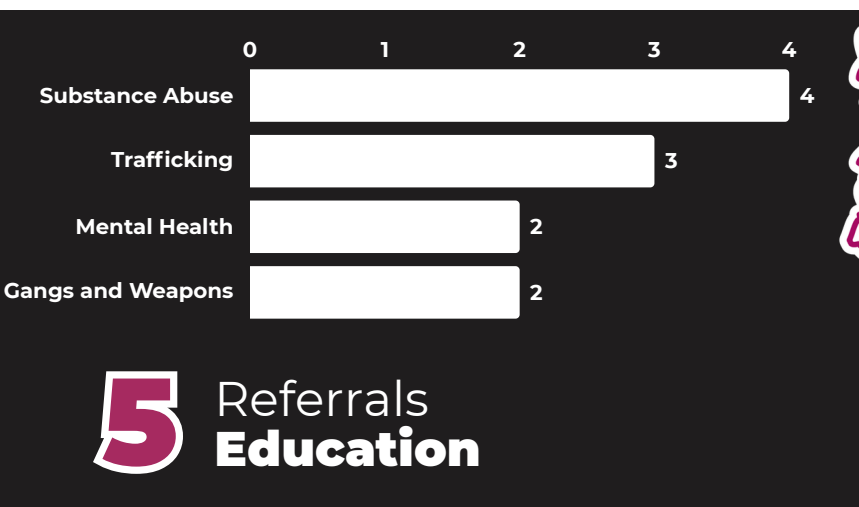






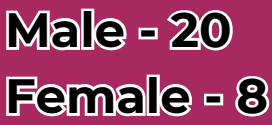
# Schools Navigators - Luton Pilot

YouTurn Futures will allocate a specialist youth worker with knife crime related lived experience to work within two identified schools within crime hotspot locations of Luton. The aim of the programme is to work on a one to one basis with young people at high risk of violence and exploitation throughout an eight week period. The focus will be to identify these young people early, before formal disengagement from education and provide bespoke support and intervention.

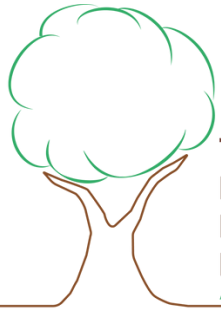


# A&E Navigators

St Giles Trust will embed specialist youth workers in Emergency Departments in Bedfordshire hospitals which have been identified via hospital admissions data as treating high numbers of violent crime victims under the age of 25. The navigators will offer support to young people presenting at A&E with concerns relating to serious youth violence and exploitation, or where staff believe there is a harm related vulnerability.



\*Some data captured has not included the area the individual comes from. Some recipients may be from outside the county.



**Tackling  
Reducing and  
Ending  
Exploitation**  
A Bedfordshire Partnership

## Bedfordshire TREE Project

Bedfordshire Youth Offending Service will partner with Groundwork to deliver in Bedford and Central Bedfordshire, while Luton Youth Partnership will work in Luton to continue the TREE Project (Tackling, Reducing and Ending Exploitation). This involves running joint patrols and outreach work in target areas such as town centres. The work will focus on minimising risk and engaging with young people by seeking opportunities to understand their choices, encouraging them to make correct decisions about lifestyle and identify opportunities for them to avoid becoming vulnerable to exploitation.

**2184** Referrals  
**Youth Engagement**

**Bedford Borough - 8**  
**Central Bedfordshire - 7**  
**Luton - 2169**

\*Some data reported on this graph are the collective number this project has reached, the VERU 60% part funds this project so the numbers are not all attributed to the VERU

## Triage & Diversion Scheme

Bedford Youth Offending Service and Luton Youth Partnership will work together to deliver an intervention aimed at preventing reoffending by finding alternatives to formal criminal justice proceedings. The programme will work with young people who have committed first-time or low-level offences and have been diverted away from the statutory youth justice service.



**Youth Partnership Service**

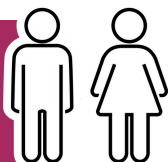
Working together to empower, support and safeguard children and young people in Luton

**Bedford Borough - 45**  
**Central Bedfordshire - 32**  
**Luton - 128**

**205** Referrals  
**Bedfordshire Police and Serious Youth Violence Panel**

All aged 10-21

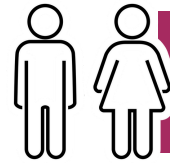
**Male - 165**  
**Female - 40**





## Positive Futures

YouTurn Futures will provide targeted, one to one support to young people at risk of serious violence and exploitation. Specialist youth workers will use a variety of approaches to support the young people in developing their social skills and self-control over the course of a 12 week programme.



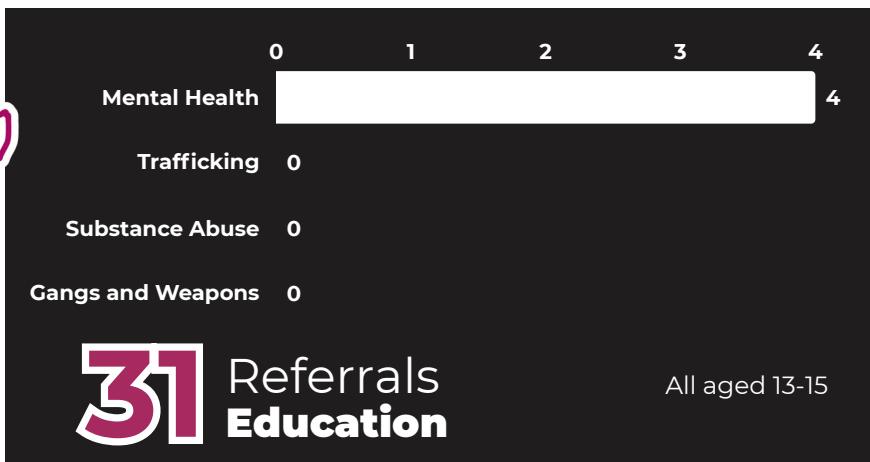
**Male - 10**  
**Female - 1**

## Skills Through Sport

Dan Gaze Support Services aim to provide a sport and inclusion intervention programme that engages children in regular, organised sport or physical activity. They will work with young people who are considered to be vulnerable to involvement in violence and/or who have already encountered the criminal justice system.



**Bedford Borough - 17**  
**Central Bedfordshire - 14**  
**Luton - 0**



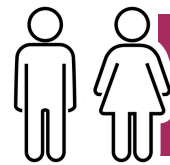
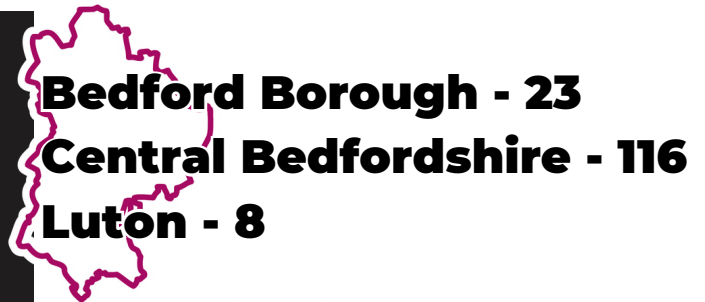
**Male - 29**  
**Female - 2**





## Social Sparks

Link To Change will offer a 6-10 week programme to provide an offer of support to young people identified as most at risk of exploitation and involvement in serious violence. They will identify the developmental needs of the young person and create a bespoke programme of support. The aim is to equip these young people with the necessary knowledge, social skills and self-control to reduce the risk of harm.



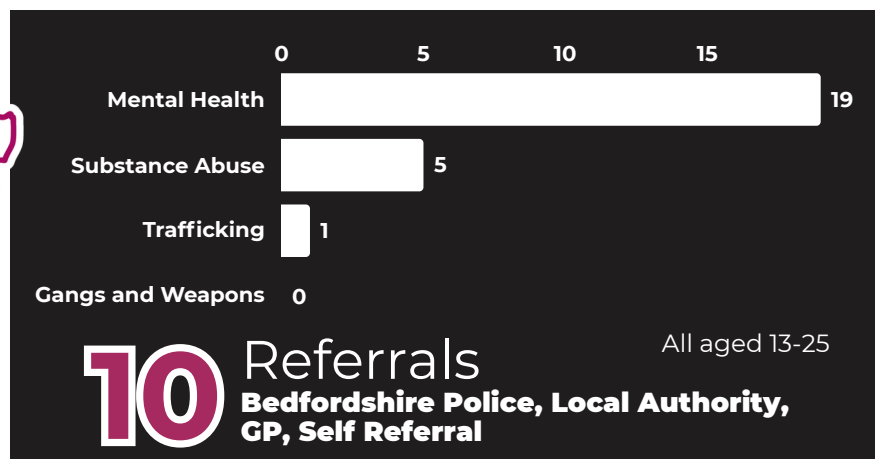
**Male - 89**  
**Female - 58**

## Evolve

Bedfordshire Open Door and Sorted will partner to offer a counselling service aimed at supporting children to recover from trauma. This will involve forms of psychological therapy where a therapist provides support to individuals or small groups. By engaging with a range of agencies, including education providers, young people will be identified and referred into the service.



**Bedford Borough - 4**  
**Central Bedfordshire - 6**  
**Luton - 0**



**Male - 4**  
**Female - 6**





**COMMUNITY TRUST**

## Kicks Programme

Luton Town FC Community Trust will use sport as a medium to to divert, intervene and prevent young people from becoming involved in serious violence and criminality. This will be achieved by providing opportunities for young people to raise their aspirations, set goals and develop their personal and life skills. The programme also seeks improve their self-confidence and general wellbeing while enabling them to fulfil their potential.

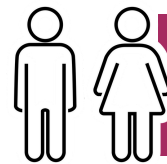


**61** Referrals  
Education and Community

All aged 10-18



**Bedford Borough - 0**  
**Central Bedfordshire - 0**  
**Luton - 61**



**Male - 56**  
**Female - 5**

## VERU Youth Voice Project

The VERU youth voice project aims to increase engagement between young people, the VERU and the wider partnership. Operating across each local authority area, the project engages with young people aged 11-24 with varying life experiences, as part of a community based youth-forum related to the prevention of violence and exploitation.



\*This service was commissioned after Q1, as such there is no data available for evaluation.



Q1

# OUR STORIES

While data paints a picture, case studies provide the finer details - further bringing our impact to life.

Case studies have been anonymised to protect the identify of those discussed.

# KICKS PROGRAMME

*Child A* has been attending our Premier League Kicks session in Bedford and the progress *Child A* has made as a player, and a person, has been phenomenal to watch.

*Child A* confided with coaching staff that they felt they have body image challenges around their weight and height and felt that this was viewed negatively by other participants when we undertook small sided games.

One of our coaches who support the Bedford session plays semi-pro football and with *Child A's* consent, began a 1:1 mentoring *Child A*. This included information, advice and guidance around developing *Child A's* technical ability both within the skills development and small sided games elements of the sessions.

Through the mentoring relationship, *Child A* felt confident enough to discuss their weight and height concerns with our coach. This led to *Child A* getting advice and guidance around the dietary requirements that a football player needs to play at a higher level, as well as what additional fitness measures *Child A* could work on outside of the sessions.

*Child A* said: "I feel and look like I have lost weight and I feel fitter from the work I do outside of the Premier League Kicks session. I feel more confident in my abilities and the positive feedback I get from the coaches and my friends at the session keeps me going."

*Child A* is keen to be further involved with our Premier League Kicks (Bedford) session so he can share his positive experiences with other participants.



**COMMUNITY  
TRUST**





## SOCIAL SPARKS

During a meeting, *Child B* really sung the praises of the practitioner and said that *Adult A* was one of the first adults *Child B* felt they could talk to and open up to.

We also received feedback from a school who said it was a pleasure to have *Adult B* delivering the workshop in our school. *Adult B* was amazing with the children and kept them fully engaged throughout the six sessions.

Feedback from a local authority partner noted how work was always consistent, targeted and theory based. The work around self-esteem and identity playing a crucial role in Link to Change work which is to be commended.

It went on to say that when the team receive referrals for young people and see that we are working with them, they always feel reassured (and relieved) that we are involved. They know that the young person will be receiving targeted, consistent, and quality support.

Link to Change are always their first recommendation for young people.





# CHANGING LIVES IN CUSTODY

*Child C* was reluctant to engage in our services when we first met them in custody. They didn't care and had no drive or passion about doing anything.

They used to say 'this is my life I'm used to it as my family are all inside as well, why should I be any different'.

When in custody we applied a small section of our Mindset Empowerment Programme based around labels. Staff labelled what they saw about *Child C* and their opinions of them in the very short space of time of meeting.

When *Child C* saw all the comments were positive from staff, *Child C* said they had not heard positive comments about themselves before and that it made them feel empowered and good. Staff showed *Child C* they were in control of their own life, and no one else. They had the power to be whatever they wanted to be. We later invited *Child C* to our Mindset Empowerment Group.

When *Child C* came to the group they were reluctant to participate, but when others encouraged *Child C*, *Child C* opened up that their life had been entrenched with drugs and having family in prison made them think 'if they're inside then that's what my life was going to be like.'

The Mindset Empowerment Programme gave *Child C* a different way of thinking and gave them the power to be in control of their life.

As a result of working with *Child C*, *Child C* enrolled on the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS). During the course *Child C* felt like they were not smart enough to achieve the qualification, this caused *Child C* to leave after the first day.



Staff persisted, encouraging Child C to return to the course and try again, which they did. Child C went on to pass the Level 1 Health and Safety qualification, but unfortunately failed the CSCS element.

When *Child C* attended their 1:1 session, they became emotional as they disclosed they had finally got in touch with their dad who they hadn't spoken to for years. When staff asked what made *Child C* get in touch with their dad, *Child C* noted that they wanted to share that they had passed their Level 1 Health and Safety qualification.

Following this, *Child C* was offered a job at their father's restaurant, to work in the kitchens providing *Child C* passed the Level 2 Food Safety qualification.

We continued to work with *Child C*, booking them on to the course and preparing them for the test. *Child C* was visibly engaged throughout and went on to pass.

*Child C* phoned Reactiv8 shortly after and thanked us for everything we had done and for giving them the chance to change and believing in themselves.



# SCHOOL NAVIGATOR

*Child D* is three sessions into our eight-week programme.

*Child D* suffers from low self-esteem, self-harms and has been using illicit drugs to self-medicate, much of which follows *Child D* witnessing domestic abuse and violence within the family home.

*Child D* has been observed by school staff as walking around school looking very down and doesn't talk about their feelings. Since working with *Child D*, we have completed a boxing referral to help improve their self-esteem and confidence.

We have worked with partners to develop a suitable care plan *Child D* which will include 'drop in' sessions that allow *Child D* to see YouTurn worker when they are struggling in school.

School staff have commented that *Child D* doesn't normally do this, but is responding well. As an additional intervention *Child D* was referred for an Emotional Freedom Technique course and has noted they really enjoy it and it has been working for them.

*Child E* had also witnessed high levels of domestic abuse and violence within their home and had been displaying a lot of anger that their dad left the family home. As a result of *Child E's* behaviour, they were at risk of permanent exclusion.

*Child E* is also three sessions into the eight-week programme and is already able to identify the source of their anger. *Child E* has agreed to receive therapeutic support and has built a trusting relationship with their support worker have both experienced the impact of knife crime.

**YouTurn**  
Restore, Reform & Reintegrate



“Both young people engage well with the programme and seem to be moving in a positive direction.

“What is evident is that before this support programme, they were unwilling to share with professionals” – Roseann Taylor, School Navigator

“The school navigator program is working well at our school. The students are enjoying the programme that Roseann is delivering and attendance has risen! Engagement with Roseann is outstanding, they come looking for her in their lunch and break times.” - Teacher



## A&E NAVIGATORS

“The team from St Giles have been working with us for several months, and in that short time have really made an impact on the service we can offer young people.

“They proactively engage with young people who have been or are at risk of becoming involved in gang related and violent activities, offering support and mentorship to those at a time when they are at the most vulnerable.

“We have been in need of the service for a long time and it is excellent that they are now working with us in such a productive manner.” - Dr David Kirby, Emergency Medicine Consultant

“We at Luton have a huge number of violent trauma patients, especially victims of stabbing and shootings between the ages of 10-25.

“St Giles’ presence and the work they are doing is a huge help, and I’ve been after something like this for years.

“I’m hoping that together we can make a difference to our local community and look forward to working closely with St Giles in the hospital but also in the community, in order to try and prevent some of the needless violence we see.

“I can’t stress how important this service is and how much help this will provide us.” - Dr Amir Reyahi, Emergency Medicine Specialist





**PREVENT | EMPOWER | AMPLIFY**

## Get in touch

Website

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