

Fast-tracking vulnerable young people into the police cadets: Initial Evaluation of the Nottinghamshire Volunteer Police Cadets (VPC) Pilot

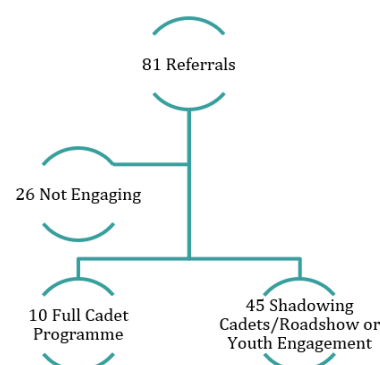
Dr Matthew Callender, May 2020

In January 2019, Nottinghamshire Police launched a pilot project named 'Fast tracking of Vulnerable Young people into the VPC', working in partnership with the National VPC. There are currently 7 senior cadet units and 5 junior cadet units in Nottinghamshire. This pioneering project aimed to trial a new model for engaging vulnerable young people into the VPC programme. This initial evaluation provides an independent assessment of the programme, documenting progress and identifying developmental areas. The approach to involved:

- Desktop analysis of quantitative data provided to IPSCJ by Nottinghamshire Police, in respect of the operation and delivery of the pilot project;
- Interviews with strategic stakeholders and operational and delivery leads; and
- Interviews/focus groups with Cadets involved in the programme.

A VPC Youth Engagement Officer was appointed to engage with vulnerable young people referred into the programme as well as deliver wider engagement with young people outside of the programme. A novel feature in Nottinghamshire are Cadet Roadshows, which offer large scale engagement with communities and young people, The Roadshows promote the available activities and options for children and young people that the police offer in Nottinghamshire as well as enable the identification of vulnerable young people who might benefit from engagement activities. Overall, 166 young people have been engaged through the Roadshows to date and, consequentially, 9 young people have joined the junior cadets through this activity.

81 children and young people had been referred or identified to the programme since its conception to 26 February 2020. Around 79% of these children and young people were male, 60% were aged between 12 and 15 years, and 64% were White British. The demographic profile of referrals demonstrates good inclusivity in terms of gender, age and ethnic origin. The ethnic origin of children and young people referred to the programme is significantly above the county profile, indicating that the programme is successful at engaging ethnic minority groups in terms of referral and participation. The main reason for referral was being at risk of crime/arrest or involvement in crime/exploitation (57%). Most referrals to the programme being made by Police Officers (54%) and nearly a fifth (19%) of children and young people were identified by the VPC Youth Engagement Officer.



There is limited evidence available to demonstrate the impacts and value of the programme for young people, though the evidence available is positive and suggests the programme enables positive change. Of 81 children and young people referred, around two-thirds (68%) have positively engaged either with the cadet programme or through shadowing cadet sessions, participated in cadet roadshows or other youth engagement.

Data were provided for 16 vulnerable young people, documenting the number of missing from home enquiry's prior to, and following approximately 6 months engagement in the programme. Some of the young people had previously had a very high number of missing from home enquiry's, with one young person having 24 prior to participation. In total, the 16 vulnerable young people before engagement had accumulated 91 incidents but had since accumulated 24 incidents. There is no reliable evidence or data to determine causality or a relationship between the programme and the reduction in missing from home enquiries for these young people. Furthermore, it is likely that these young people are engaged in multiple interventions and service provided by both the police and wider agencies. Nevertheless, this difference is worthy of further investigation using a robust methodology, ensuring comparable time lines to assess impact, that will enable a more accurate reflection of the effect and value of the programme. It should also be noted that for the first time in ten years, Nottinghamshire has experienced a reduction in Missing from Home incidents.

Young People's Views:

- **Overall positivity:** All the young people who participated in the evaluation were positive towards the pilot and outlined how the pilot created a positive space for them to engage in activities and meet new people. Vulnerable young people spoke highly of the pilot and its value at supporting them to make a positive change in their attitudes and outlook. With young people engaging with police officers on a weekly basis, young people saw themselves as less likely to engage in negative activities.
- **Meeting new people and developing connections:** Participants described how they had met many different people unlike themselves which had been good for their social development. Perhaps the largest identified positive impact in young people accounts were their views of and relationships with policing.
- **Learning new things:** The pilot was seen as offering young people new knowledge that was both relevant in their lives and different from what they receive at school. It was indicated that the learning opportunities outlined in the previous section had increased young people's awareness and engagement in social issues, which had in turn increased their worldview.
- **Some negative experiences and developmental opportunities:** There were a few specific negative experiences some young people outlined, such as not enjoyed specific activities. There were a few young people who indicated sessions could be better designed suggesting that it would be good if both informative and practical or interactive components were included.

A VPC Youth Engagement Officer

The introduction of a defined VPC Youth Engagement Officer has been reported by stakeholders as being critical to the perceived success and impact of the new approach to working with young people and supporting them to be involved in positive policing programmes. It was indicated that, in addition to the specific Fast-Track pilot, the VPC Youth Engagement Officer coordinates initiatives during demanding periods such as school holidays. Critically, the VPC Youth Engagement Officer's practice was seen as instrumental to engaging young people who otherwise would be opposed to or a challenge to policing.

Programme SWOT

| STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Community engagement | Reliance on individuals |
| Perceptions of policing | Resource deficit |
| Diversity of cohorts | Lack of standardisation |
| Sense of belonging | Pace of development |
| Bridge gap between MP and Cadets | Capacity of programme |
| OPPORTUNITIES | THREATS |
| Alignment and connections between units | Limited training for unit leaders |
| Develop relationships with communities | Over reliance on individuals |
| Build evidence base | Safeguarding in practice |
| Explore sponsorship and external inputs | Governance and oversight |

Conclusions

Overall, the evidence presented in this summary report demonstrates how the Nottinghamshire Fast-Tracking Vulnerable Young People into the Cadets Pilot has been very successful at engaging large numbers of vulnerable young people, especially those from minority backgrounds. The introduction of a new position, the VPC Youth Engagement Officer, has strengthened Nottinghamshire Police's commitment to youth engagement and enables more and wider opportunities for young people to positively engage with policing. The targeted focus on vulnerable young people is laudable and supports a shift in the ethos of cadets from being for the privileged. Young people were very positive about their involvement in the cadets and felt that it had enabled them to create new contacts with other young people and develop a sense of belonging. Crucially, involvement in the programme motivated some young people not to be drawn back into negative influences and their ongoing connections with officers gave young people another reason not to do what they see as being wrong. There are, however, a series of developmental issues that require some consideration to improve outcomes, the overall cohesiveness of the programme and to secure it within Nottinghamshire strategy.