VIOLENCE REDUCTION NETWORK

PREVENTION THROUGH CONNECTION

EVALUATION OF THE UNLOCKING POTENTIAL PROJECT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

- Rocket Science were commissioned by the Violence Reduction Network (VRN) to conduct an independent evaluation of the Unlocking Potential Project.

- The UP project, operational since 2019, provides interventions and prevention for young people between the ages of 16 and 25 who have committed a serious violent offence.

- Until February 2022, the project comprised of a single member of staff – the Project Development Manager (PDM). Since February, the UP caseload has been split across 2 members of staff.

- The project seeks to provide holistic support to remove barriers and increase engagement with education, training, and employment opportunities. This includes providing one to one psycho-social support addressing areas including housing and mental wellbeing as well as practical advice and guidance in relation to CV building, disclosure and employability workshops and training opportunities.

Methodology

- The evaluation had three aims:
  - ➢ To understand what short-term outcomes young people do and do not achieve through the UP intervention and how these outcomes are achieved
  - ➢ To evidence the longer-term impacts of the intervention in relation to offending and reoffending
  - ➢ To provide recommendations for the future delivery of UP

- The evaluation took a mixed-methodological approach combining data analysis with qualitative interviews with young people, staff and external stakeholders. Due to staffing changes, the intended numbers of young people could not be reached.

- Data analysis using monitoring and outcome data supplied by the service has been used to understand the range and types of young people involved in the UP project and the success of the programme in terms of achieving outcomes

Service Overview

Summary of Findings:

- Analysis in this section is based on monitoring data for 153 UP project participants, 135 of whom have now completed the project

- The largest number of new starters on the project were in the period from Q3 2020-21 through to Q3 2021-22

- Out of 139 participants on the UP project with postcode information available, most were from Leicestershire (59%) and just over a third were from the Leicester City Council area (36%)

- There is evidence that the project is reaching a diverse range of communities across Leicestershire. This is in relation to both areas of deprivation and also the demographic profile of young people accessing the project

- 94% of participants are male. This may be an under representation of young women and girls eligible to take part in the project

- 81% of participants are aged between 17 and 23

- The National Probation Service (51 participants) and ENGAGE (36 participants) are the two most common sources of referrals
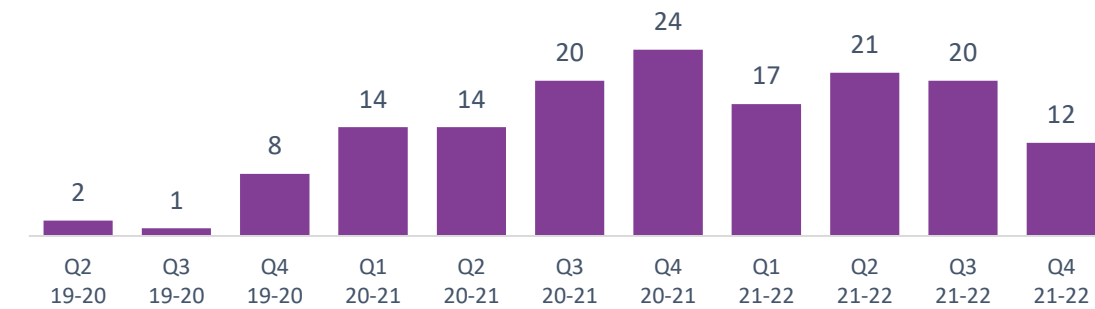

Figure 1: Number of young people starting UP programme by quarter, where intervention was also completed by 30 March 22
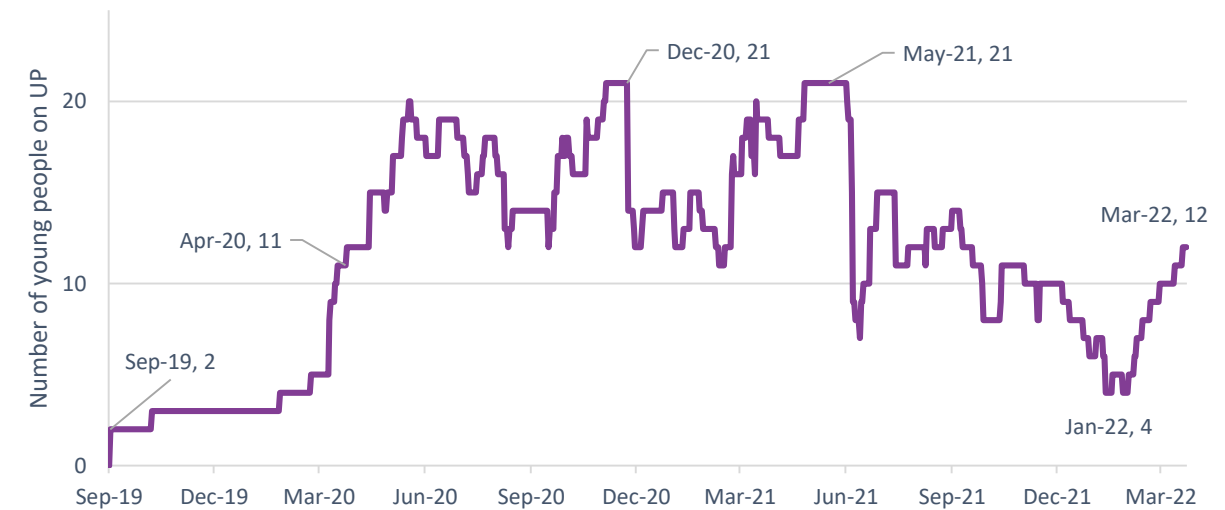

Figure 2: Number of young people on the programme by date

Ethnicity	UPP participants			Overall catchment area (weighted by participant numbers)
	n		%	%
White	82		60.3%	77.9%
Mixed	23		16.9%	2.0%
Black	15		11.0%	2.5%
Asian	9		6.6%	16.4%
Other	7		5.1%	1.1%
Total	**136**			

Figure 3: Number of UP participants by ethnicity

Impact on the risk factors associated with Violence

Summary of Findings

- The two most common risk factors identified for young people on the UP project are 'known to be involved in offending' (85.6%) and 'NEET at start of intervention' (83.6%)

- As intended, employment, education and training are the risk factors most commonly addressed through the UP project – 66% of young people had this risk factor addressed

- 69% (93 out of 135) of young people completing the UP project have had at least one risk factor addressed

- Young people self-reported substantial improvements in their wellbeing across five categories; optimism, self-esteem, confidence, resilience, and their ability to manage anger

- 80% of young people self-reported that they were feeling more positive about the future because of the UP project

- Young people also reported substantial improvement in their confidence in getting into work, in the skills they need to get into work and in their motivation to get into work and/or training

- 91% self-reported increased confidence in gaining or staying in employment

- 91% self-reported increased motivation to get into and stay in work

- Given the lack of post-project data we are not able to draw conclusions about the projects impact on subsequent offending or involvement in violence.
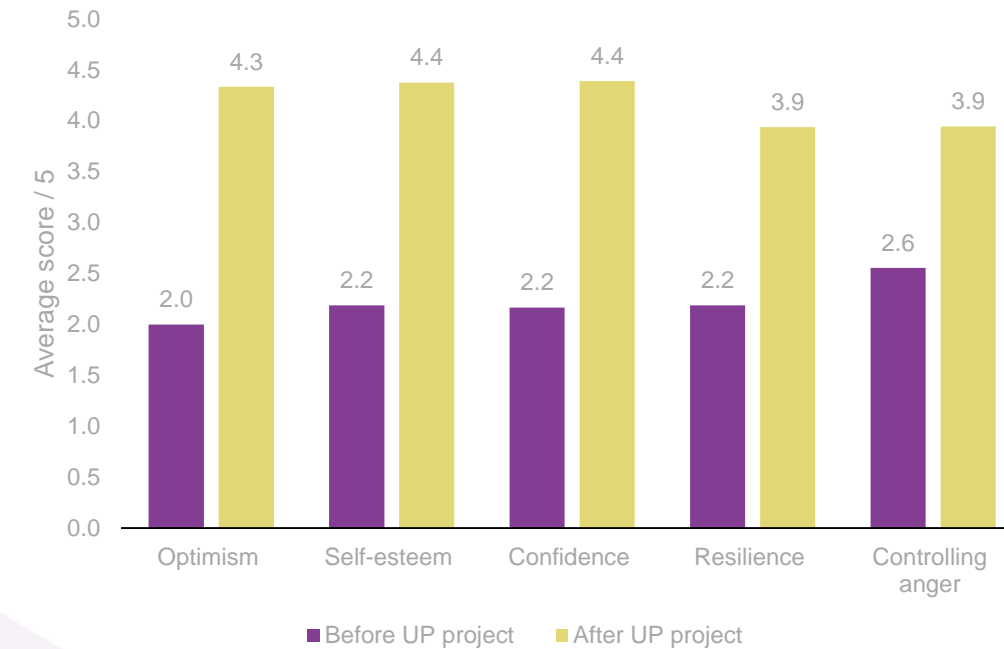

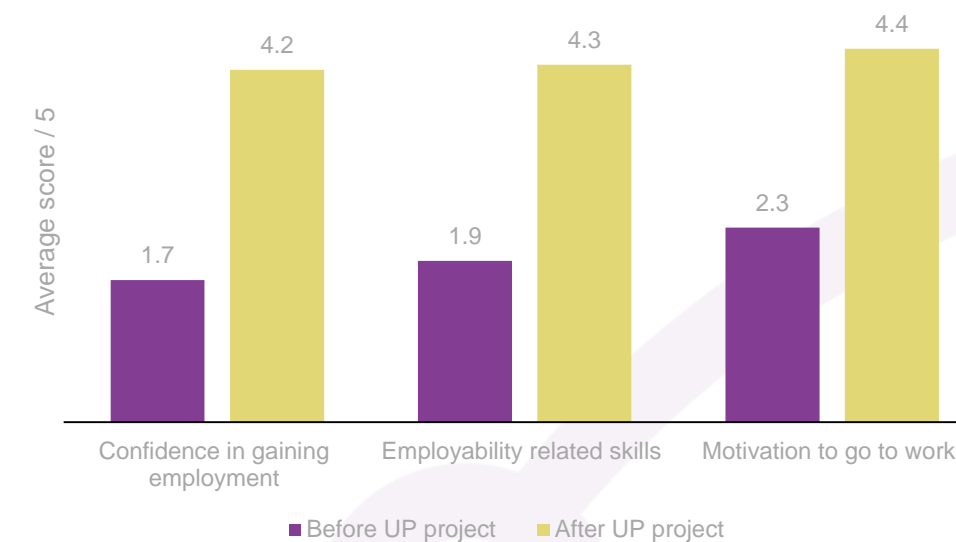Figure 4: UP participants' self-reported pre- and post- wellbeing scores

Figure 5: UP participants' self-reported pre- and post- ETE scores

"I feel I am in a better place mentally because of them. Because once I had lost my job, I didn't have any focus and I had a bout of depression, and **they gave me this motivation to pull myself out of that slump**."

"It [positivity about the future] has majorly improved I know I'm not going to be stuck doing the same s**t forever – **I'm going to make something of my life**."

"I used to smoke a lot of marijuana to drown it all out and now I have completely stopped, and **I feel like a new person**."

"When I met her, I was really quiet and anxious, and I couldn't find the words to say things. **She helped me find my voice**. I was so negative I lacked self-confidence so much, at that period of time I don't know what I would have done without the UP project**, I would be back inside prison, or I wouldn't be here**. She went out of her way to help me I don't know what I would have done without her."

"The UP project helped me boost my self-esteem and then it carried on and got better with time with time on my own. **It helped me know I can do it on my own**."

"Before I was very angry and now, I still get angry, but **I know how to control it**. I try not to get to that place."

"**I don't think I would have been involved in anything if it weren't for the UP project** – I don't think I would have been able to access the educational things that I have or know or known where to turn."

"Yeah, I feel like I've developed skills through UP… personal skills like **communication skills, social skills, being able to work as a team**."

"Ever since she said to me, I could get a CSCS card – then it put me on a path, and she said I could help you get into work after, and **it made me feel differently about things**."

"When I started because of my depression [my motivation was low], but now, **I've not had a single day off my new job**. Before the UP project if I had a bad day, I wouldn't go in. I didn't have the mentality to stick at it. I have stuck through this job I haven't had any days off I've been really consistent with it. **Even if I'm having a bad day I will get up and go to work**."

Quality of Support Received

Summary of Findings – Young People

- The UP project provides holistic support to young people which is focussed on ETE

- Participants typically needed more intensive support early in their time with the UP project, and this was provided by the project to meet participants' needs

- Young people spoke extremely positively about the support they had received from the Project Development Manager (PDM). They felt she was approachable, adaptable, fun, and non-judgemental

- Young people reported that the support was person centred. They felt in control of their support and were able to make decisions about what opportunities they wanted to take

- Young people were asked which element of the UP project support was most helpful to them. Many said that the knowledge that there was someone who believed in them, wanted to help them, and was not going to give up on them was the key to the success of the project

- All young people who were asked said they would recommend the UP project to others. When asked to rate the support from the UP project out of 5, the average rating was 4.7, with 7 of the 9 young people who responded to this question rating the support 5/5

Activities included:

- Goal setting activities (setting personal development goals)
- Finding and recommending courses, supporting enrolment on courses
- Support in progressing through qualifications
- Support in disclosing convictions to employers including writing disclosure letters and disclosure workshops
- CV writing
- Finding and recommending job opportunities, and supporting submission of job applications
- Emotional support / support with wellbeing, including making referrals to therapeutic support
- Access to healthy relationships courses and wellbeing courses through New Dawn New Day
- Development of peer mentoring opportunities.

"Having someone listening to what I wanted to do and believing that I could do it was the most helpful part of the support. Not every day was a good day... [but] they believed in me. If you miss an appointment because you don't want to go, they don't kick you out. They don't give up."

Conclusions and Recommendations

Key Findings:

- There is evidence of **positive impacts** for young people upon a number of risk factors related to offending including wellbeing indicators and meaningful use of time.

- Young people similarly **report substantial improvements** which are likely to positively impact upon engagement with ETE, including increases in confidence, optimism, self-esteem, resilience, ability to manage anger, and motivation towards education or employment. Young people attribute these gains to their participation in the UP project.

Considerations:

- Evidence of **tangible outcomes for young people are less definitive** and this is a result of the outcome metrics being used and recording by the service. For instance, just 13 young people (8%) have a recorded outcome of entering employment, education, or a work placement.

- There should be **greater emphasis on data collection and data integrity** to evidence outcomes by the service. Inconsistent recording between pre- and post- intervention results in gaps and there are opportunities to improve data recording, particularly in relation to pre- and post-support surveys to routinely collect evidence from young people.

- Consideration should be given to:

  - **Using a validated, scaled tool** for both assessment and review of progress for young people (e.g. Outcome Star, Justice Star)
  - Supporting and/or resourcing to enable **follow up in relation to subsequent offending behaviour** would enable objective assessment of the impact of the UP project on re-offending
  - Ensuring **data validation and consistency of pre- and post- survey** scoring is required
  - Reviewing **demographic characteristics of young people** accessing the project would ensure that any barriers to access are identified and addressed