

UNIVERSITY OF
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**West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit Evaluation:
Serious Youth Violence pathfinder**

Summary Evaluation Report



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Introduction

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) is working to support frontline service improvement through grants and activity that target system-wide challenges. This involves a 'pathfinder' approach whereby local authorities and partners can pilot, develop, and disseminate whole system solutions to problems. In this context, whole systems approaches entail partnership working across the region to intervene early in violent activity. The YJB has funded pathfinder programmes in the West Midlands, overseen by the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit (WMVRU) in conjunction with the seven West Midlands (Police & Crime Commissioner area) Youth Offending Teams (YOTs).

In September 2020 First Class Foundation were commissioned, through a competitive tender process, to deliver their Kitchen Table Talks (KTT) programme across the seven YOTs. First Class Foundation describe KTT as a culturally competent, psychologically informed, peer to peer outreach, engagement, and support programme to support and work closely with the parents of young people involved with the Youth Justice System to act a bridge between the parents and the YOTs. The service is designed to support parents of those most at risk of reoffending, by helping them to understand the youth justice system, being a sounding board and relaying information back to the YOT to help the service better understand and support the parents.



An evaluation was commissioned to investigate *if* and *how* the development and delivery of Peer Support networks for parents is:

- working towards reducing offending/reoffending and reducing the seriousness of offences
- improving the quality of relationships between parent/carer and the child
- influencing parents' confidence, knowledge, wellbeing, parenting style, engagement

This summary report presents key findings and recommendations from the evaluation, undertaken between September 2020 and February 2022. A full technical report is available on request from icrd@wlv.ac.uk

Summary of key findings

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected with parents, staff, and YOTs. The quantitative findings show that there was a **significant increase in participants' wellbeing** and **perceived confidence with parenting** during engagement with KTT, and this continued to increase the longer participants were engaged¹. Referral and monitoring data are presented below.

The qualitative research explored the process of implementing the project across seven YOTs, explored barriers, and sought to understand the impact on parents engaged with the project. The findings highlighted that while **referral processes** varied according to the YOT, they showed more success where they were embedded into core YOT practices, supported by senior management, and where close working relationships were built with KTT. There is clear potential for parents to be empowered and for YOTs to build on the engagement with KTT, bringing more of the **parent voice** into YOT work. Parental knowledge, resourcing and active involvement is crucial for children's engagement and completion of youth justice sentences².

The evaluation data shows that KTT is based on the idea that **self-care** is an important step to supporting parents to deal with the stresses and strains of having a child in the youth justice system. The self-care focus is important in engaging parents and helps distinguish KTT from statutory services. Their use of "goody bags", and meeting in cake shops and cafes, encapsulates that idea. It is likely that engagement with KTT reduces isolation and feelings of shame.

There were mixed reports about the extent to which Covid-19 had understandably impacted KTT delivery, with digital exclusion and literacy likely to have meant some parents were not able to access KTT during the lockdown period. However, contact was adapted and maintained through online provision and postal gifts, ensuring gestures of care could be maintained. There were **high levels of perceived value** in the support and signposting being provided for a group who remain on the margins of youth justice in policy terms, but are often instrumental in terms of wellbeing, order completion and desistance. The offer should, going forward, be an appropriate blend of physical meetings (with a physical presence required in each of the areas) and virtual means than have scale across the geography.

In summary, YOTs and the project provider involved in this pilot have **worked collectively** to find ways to consistently refer parents into KTT, reflecting on the processes adopted in each area. KTT demonstrates **effectiveness in engaging parents**, but - as highlighted in the recommendations below - the programme could be developed through a clear outcomes

¹ Up to 12 weeks, when the final data were collected

² Brooks-Wilson, S., (2020), '[Rethinking youth justice journeys: complex needs, impeded capabilities and criminalisation](#)', *Youth Justice*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 309-327.

framework and refinement of programme structures and activities. There is evidence that engagement with KTT has a positive impact on parent’s well-being and confidence with parenting. More time needs to elapse to understand if there has been an impact on young people’s offending behaviours. The end of this pilot presents an opportunity to reflect on the successes to date, share the learning, and to use the recommendations presented in this report to further develop the provision.

Limitations of the data are discussed in the full technical report.

Points of commendation

- KTT’s flexible approach to referrals, responding to the needs of each YOT
- KTT’s flexible approach to engaging parents, offering a variety of ways to connect
- YOTs reflecting and developing good practice to increase referral numbers
- KTT providing a programme that particularly engages parents from ethnically diverse communities, offer the potential to break down barriers between parents and criminal justice agencies
- The desire from YOTs to find new ways to hear the parent voice demonstrates the value that engaging wit KTT has brought

Referrals

The KTT team have provided us with information on referrals. Between the launch of the project across seven YOTs in 2020, and the final data collection point in February 2022, 198 referrals had been made to KTT. Of the parents referred, 181 were women and 17 men. 47% were recorded as White British, 15% Black Caribbean, 11% Pakistani, and 10% Black African. Date were received from YOTs for 151 children whose parent(s) had been referred to KTT. Children ranged from 11 to 19 years old with an average age of 15 years old.

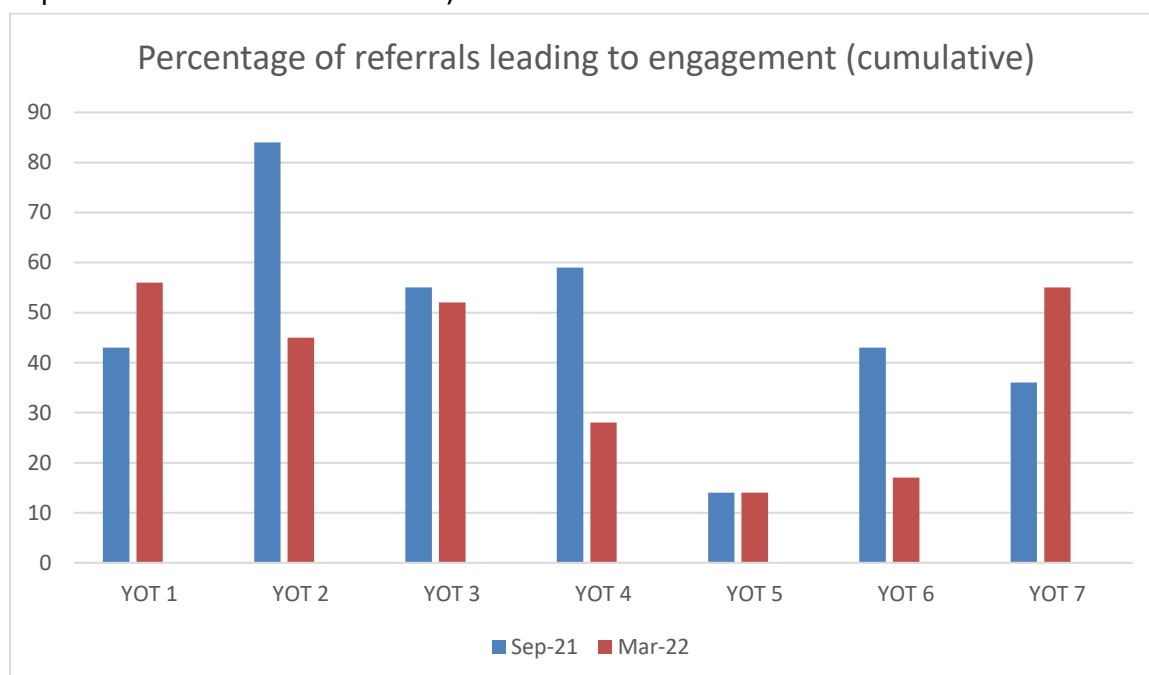
Referrals	March 2021	September 2021	March 2022
Cumulative Total referrals	66	138	198
Male	9	2 (11)	6 (17)
Female	57	70 (127)	54 (181)

Concerns Highlighted at Referral:

Child Concerns	March 2021	Sept 2021	March 2022
Anti-social behaviour	31	43	20
Truancy	5	9	6
Gone missing	13	23	10
Association with perpetrators of crime	23	36	22
Behaviour concern	33	63	48
Substance/Alcohol misuse	22	36	12
Special Needs	7	11	14
Parent/Carer Concerns	March 2021	Sept 2021	March 2022
Anti-social behaviour	6	8	3

Mental health concerns	16	12	14
Domestic disturbances	14	27	10
Chaotic lifestyle	6	14	3
Lack of guidance/supervision over child(ren)	17	36	24
Substance/Alcohol misuse	10	12	2
Lack of confidence in parenting	14	32	19

Percentage of referrals that result in parental engagement (data only available for September 2021 and March 2022):



Recommendations and actions

The recommendations in this report are directly informed by the evaluation findings. Themes of particular importance relate to: the policies and processes that connect the Kitchen Table Talks programme with local YOT sites; ways that programme benefits could be extended for parents; an exploration of ways in which theoretical underpinnings could further inform provision and; refinements to the collection and analysis of programme data.

YOT-related process and policy

To maximise the potential and success for parents and children, YOTs and the provider should:

- Design and implement a clear and focused referral process
- Develop a more robust framework to clearly identify measurable impact on parental efficacy and wellbeing, as well as any wider benefits in relation to outcomes for young people and the youth justice system

- Articulate an outcomes framework that could be linked to a parental progression mapping exercise, to assess the different impact of youth justice system contact and peer support
- Enhance multi-agency working across the partnership, which would allow clearer understanding of the impact and outcomes of referrals
- Consider this provision when developing their local strategies
- Ensure all YOT staff are adequately briefed on the provision including information in staff induction packages
- Create a promotion plan to ensure the provision is widely promoted to parents. For example, the 'Mythbuster' video developed by Birmingham and KTT could be effective in this area
- Work with other YOTs to share best practice with each other about effective implementation, outside of the current steering group (for example, at YOT regional meetings)
- Find a solution to tensions between provision independence and information sharing

Our parent specific recommendations

- Parent ambassadors should be further empowered to harness their local knowledge and experiences
- Consideration should be given by the Youth Justice Service to establishing parent forums using the experience and knowledge of the parent ambassadors
- Clear exit strategies for parents from the programme should be developed, once goals have been achieved
- Detailed information sharing protocols should be developed between YOTs and the provider
- Meaningful routes to parental empowerment that focus on self-care and community building should be developed to equip parents with knowledge and skills that empower them in their engagements with the youth justice system
- Parameter setting around the offer duration would help set clear expectations for parents

Programme structure and content should:

- Have an up-to-date manual of the key provision aims, which is based on a sound theoretical and evidence-based approaches
- Be explicitly mapped to a Theory of Change or Logic Model to enable it to be further developed as the programme evolves to allow outcome mapping to be aligned
- Explicitly outline the potential engagement methods by the provider to parents and partner agencies

Data and evaluation effectiveness requires that:

- There should be a clear data sharing agreement and time frames in place at start with clear review points
- There should be consistent data collection by KTT staff, considering any training needs

- There should be a continuation of data collection to enable a follow-up analysis/evaluation
- There should be a commitment for the evaluation team, provider, and YJB to work together to produce a 'key ingredients for successfully working with parents' document, based on the finding of this evaluation and to be shared nationally

About the evaluation

The [Institute for Community Research and Development](#) (ICRD) at the University of Wolverhampton and the University of Birmingham were commissioned to evaluate *if* and *how* the development and delivery of Peer Support networks for parents is:

- working towards reduction in offending/reoffending and reducing the seriousness of offences
- improving the quality of relationships between parent/carer and the child
- influencing parents' confidence, knowledge, wellbeing, parenting style, engagement

We worked with parents, KTT staff, and YOT staff to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences and the impact of the programme. We also explored the way the project was developed, implemented, and managed. This element fed into the recommendations to support the continued development of the project.

We are continuing to work with the seven YOTs, making use of data they already collect, to understand the impact of the programme on young people whose parents are taking part in the programme.

Data collection:

- Quantitative data from parents: At the start of their engagement with Kitchen Table Talks and at six week and 12 week intervals, parents were asked to complete a questionnaire of robust and widely validated measures of wellbeing and perceived confidence with parenting
- Interviews and focus groups were conducted at two time points with staff from all seven YOTs involved in the programme
- Interviews were conducted at two time points with three members of the Kitchen Table Talks team
- Focus groups, observations, and interview involving nine parent users of Kitchen Table and one parent ambassadors
- Demographic data, and data on engagement with the YOT and Education, provided by YOTs for children whose parent(s) is engaged with Kitchen Table Talks
- Referral and monitoring data provided by Kitchen Table Talks

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