



Improving Wellbeing; Reducing Violence

A review and feasibility study
into services for young people
in Birmingham and West Midlands

September 2022





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Introduction to Birmingham Feasibility Study

Barrow Cadbury Trust (charity reg: 1115476) supported Khulisa to run a feasibility study into the specific needs of young adults, aged 18-25 in the Birmingham region, with a particular focus on youth violence.

Given our background we focused specifically on those young people who lack access to services and who have experienced adverse childhood experiences, such as poverty, drug or alcohol misuse, domestic or street violence, and mental health issues.

This report is a result of 6 months of research, surveys, and interviews across the sector with this demographic.



Methodology

The report is comprised of;

- Desk based research – including reviews of Birmingham youth services strategies, national census data and;
- Interviews with 15 sector peers, charities, and agents in the criminal justice system operating in Birmingham with our target group. Interviews collect qualitative data and, where possible, explored internal surveys or quantitative data that peers were able to share with us.
- When reviewing data we focused on areas where youth violence and deprivation rates were highest, including Central, North, and North West Birmingham, including wards of **Lozells**, **Saltley**, and **Handsworth**.



About Khulisa

Khulisa (meaning 'to nurture' in Zulu) is an award-winning national charity, supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing. Our programmes have been successful in reducing violence and conflict in post-apartheid South African communities since 1997 and were first piloted in the UK in 2007.



Since then, Khulisa has developed a reputation as an expert in social and emotional wellbeing by supporting young people.

We have worked in prisons since 2007 and in schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) since 2011, delivering SEL (social and emotional learning) programmes.

It is now widely accepted that children's social skills (such as conscientiousness, self-discipline and perseverance) are more accurate predictors of their health, wealth, and criminal history in later life than IQ or social background.

As such, Khulisa's team of therapists work with young people and the adults who care for them, to provide a range of interventions which are designed to build social and emotional skills. Recent evaluations of our work show that young people's motivation, self-confidence and wellbeing are significantly improved.

Over time we have also realised the critical importance of young people having positive relationships and being in an environment which responds effectively to their emotional needs.



Our key partners include local authorities, schools and prisons. We are also members of London Youth, Clinks, the Alliance for Youth Justice, and the Fair Education Alliance that promotes the wellbeing of vulnerable young people.

"It was as if this programme was made for me, I was in the right place and I learnt that people want me around. I learnt how to trust people. It helped me get more confidence and it helped me a lot to control myself. I'm proud of myself, I did really well compared with how I am in class" – Billy, 13



Our Mission and Values

- We exist to support excluded or marginalised young people who are at risk of exclusion, and the professionals, peers, and carers who support them.
- We've become an award-winning UK charity, diversifying our services beyond prisons to incorporate preventative programmes with young people in schools and the community.
- Our 2021-24 Strategy has a goal of deepening partnership work in key regions experiencing youth violence and high levels of trauma. This feasibility study sits within this goal.
- Our Values are to Guide, Nurture, Restore and Empower – all partnership work that might result from this feasibility study sits within these values.



Track Record

- **Supported 5,232 people** via our social and emotional wellbeing programmes;
- **4,481 professionals through trauma informed training**, including teachers, carers, parents, social workers, and probation officers;
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:**
Independent evaluation with NESTA and the University of Sussex looked at the extent of transformational change in the lives of the young people we work with, and found statistical significant evidence across all four of the outcomes we measure.



1 in 3

It is estimated that 1 in 3 young people will experience a traumatic event by the age of 18 but only a small minority will receive professional support.



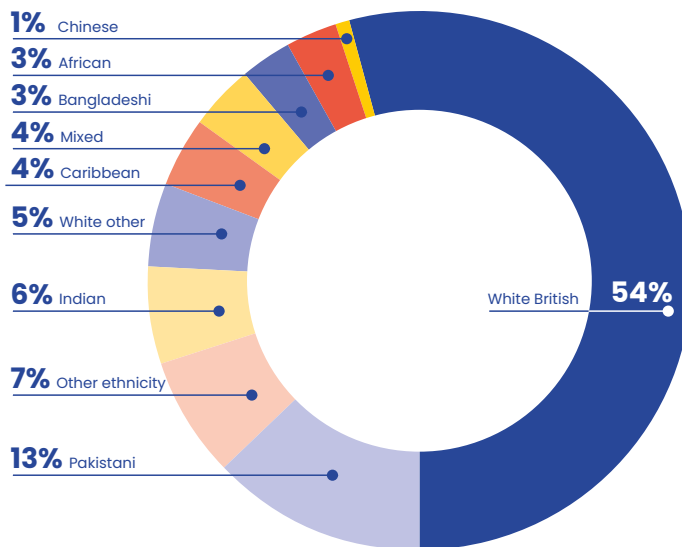
Regional Differences

With all feasibility studies, the specific regional differences and unique experiences of local communities need to be considered. We have done this primarily by reviewing the most recent census from 2011 and data from West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit Interactive Map. We have looked specifically at demographics around race, age and socio-economic backgrounds.

Ethnicity and Race

The three most common ethnic groups in Birmingham are:

- White British
- Pakistani
- Indian



This census showed more than 26 percentage point higher difference between respondents identifying as White British in England compared to Birmingham.

More than 11 percentage point difference between respondents identifying as Pakistani in Birmingham compared to England as a whole.

A smaller difference of 3.4 percentage points between the number of census respondents identifying as Indian in Birmingham compared to England as a whole. 58% of under 18s are from minority ethnic backgrounds ([Birmingham Children's Trust, Birmingham Youth Justice Strategic Plan, 2019](#)).



Age

Birmingham has one of the youngest populations in Europe

26% (274,135) of the population is under 18 years

Young people's Experiences: [BCT Research](#)

- 11.8% reported living with others who got into trouble with the police.
- 37.5% had lost someone special from their life.
- 69% get angry and lose their temper
- 10.2% thought about hurting themselves and 8.7% about killing themselves
- 52.2% had friends who got in trouble
- 47.6% admitted to truanting from school

Age-Based Gap in Services Post-16 Years

The young people we looked at supporting fall into an age bracket that means they often miss out on services. Families are often unable to support older teens and young people have less statutory provision from the age of 18 onwards. Parental households are often still supporting young people financially or with housing, whilst no longer receiving the additional financial, health or social services such as CAMHS (child and mental health services).

The 2011 Census in Birmingham recorded that there is a greater proportion of single parents with dependent children than the average for England. The term 'dependent children' here refers to 0-15 year olds and 16-18 year olds in full time education.

This is potentially an area of concern when it is considered that in Birmingham effectively 20% of 18-24-year-olds are unemployed⁷, the national figure being only 13.5%. Whilst not considered dependents, 18 to 25 year olds who are not employed may still need support from their home.

Anecdotal evidence from parents engaged with YMCA, is that there are often tensions in family dynamics which mean they no longer want their older children to live with them.



Poverty and Deprivation

Comparing the censuses from 2001 and 2011 in Birmingham, the percentage of unemployed and part time workers increased, whilst the percentage of full time workers decreased.

It is also recorded that the pandemic has affected young adults (those under 25 years in this case) in Birmingham the most out of any age group in terms of unemployment. Deprivation affecting children, and unemployment and NEET statistics, are therefore not isolated figures, but an ongoing systemic issue putting communities at risk of violence.

With poverty being a predictor of violence in the community, the pandemic has not helped matters. Since the pandemic, the under 25 age group has lost more jobs nationally than any other age group⁷. In Birmingham especially, not counting those in permanent education and not looking for work, effectively 20% of 18-24-year-olds are unemployed⁷, the national figure being only 13.5%. Rising unemployment is linked to the current levels of deprivation, which are linked to an increased risk of violence.

Most deprived areas:

The table on the following page ranks Birmingham wards by their aggregate Index of Deprivation score with 1 being the most deprived to the least deprived.

The table also highlights where each wards IMD score would rank it nationally in terms of IMD decile with 1 being in the most deprived 10% of areas nationally, 2 in the top 20% of deprived areas, and so on.

The top 10 most deprived wards are mainly comprised by inner city areas but also include some more deprived outer city and suburban areas. ([IMD, 2019](#))

For example; Lozells ranks 12th out of the 132 areas in Birmingham and 27th out of the West Midlands as a whole.

The West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) also highlights that income deprivation affecting young people is also a risk factor for violence. In this VRU context children are categorised as aged 0-15 years. This does not account for the young adults in a similar position.



Birmingham Ward Deprivation Rankings

Table Source: IMD Rankings by Birmingham Ward

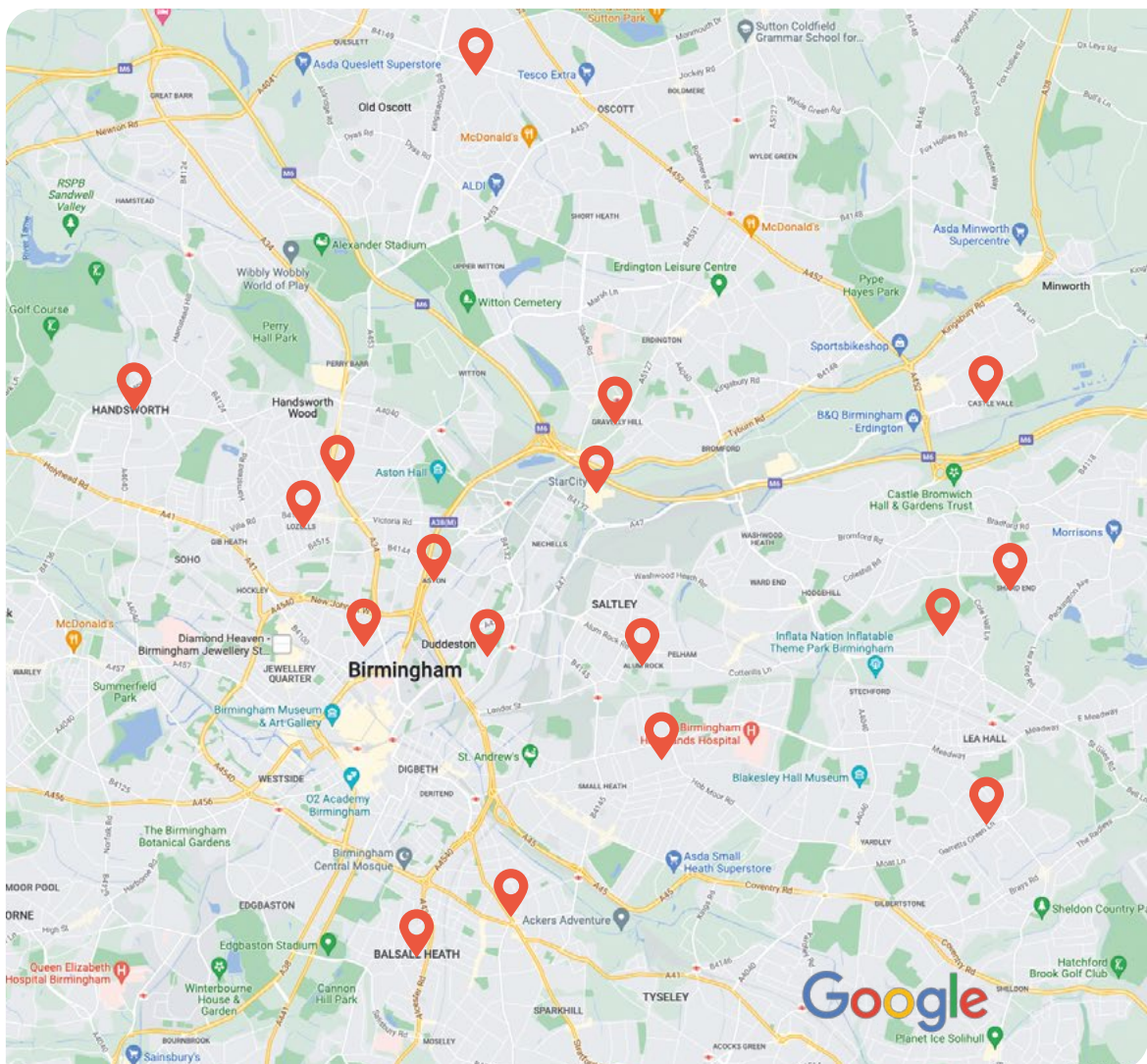
Ward	2019 Birmingham Ward Rank	2015 Birmingham Ward Rank	Change in Rank 2015 to 2019	2019 Decile (where 1 is 10% Most Deprived Nationally)
Sparkbrook & Balsall Heath East	1	2	1	1
Bordesley Green	2	4	2	1
Lozells	3	3	-	1
Castle Vale	4	18	14	1
Alum Rock	5	5	-	1
Newtown	6	1	-5	1
Heartlands	7	9	2	1
Gravelly Hill	8	10	2	1
Balsall Heath West	9	6	-3	1
Birchfield	10	7	-3	1
Shard End	11	12	1	1
Kingstanding	12	16	4	1
Garretts Green	13	14	1	1
Aston	14	11	-3	1
Glebe Farm & Tile Cross	15	17	2	1
Handsworth	16	20	4	1
Kings Norton South	17	13	-4	1
Ward End	18	21	3	1
Bordesley & Highgate	19	15	-4	1
Tyseley & Hay Mills	20	22	2	1
Small Heath	21	19	-2	1
Frankley Great Park	22	24	2	1
Holyhead	23	23	-	1
Nechells	24	8	-16	1
Druids Heath & Monyhull	25	27	2	1
Stockland Green	26	28	2	1
Yardley West & Stechford	27	26	-1	1
Perry Common	28	29	1	2
Soho & Jewellery Quarter	29	25	-4	2
Sparkhill	30	30	-	2
Bartley Green	31	31	-	2
Allens Cross	32	35	3	2
Bromford & Hodge Hill	33	33	-	2
Billesley	34	37	3	2
Weoley & Selly Oak	35	41	6	2



Geographic Focus

Using google maps we mapped out where geographical needs and opportunities for partnership work might be, cross referencing with the VRU data and West Midlands Police on where violent incidences and youth crime is most prevalent.

This shows hotspots across Central and North Birmingham and a correlation between more deprived areas and high violence areas, for example. Wards we have chosen to focus our partner research on include those operating in Handsworth, Aston, Perry bar, Lozells, Birchfield, Erdington based in data from the VRU and feedback in partner interviews.





Intersectionality

Research by West Midlands Combined Authority entitled “Punishing Abuse” looked at young people involved with the criminal justice system with a history of trauma and abuse⁸, from a sample of 80 young people (12–20 yrs) already known to the Youth Offending Teams (YOT) in the West Midlands.

The report highlighted that these young people evidently needed support from a young age but that “there has been a systemic failure to meet their needs from across a range of public services”⁹

- 50% had confirmed possession of a knife/ blade
- 54% were recorded as perpetrators of violence in the community⁸
- 89% of them had faced either mental health issues, substance abuse, or domestic violence
- A third had experienced all three⁹

Based on a combination of three factors, **mental health**, **income deprivation**, and **lack of development in early years education** the VRU created a risk index¹⁹. The index ranks each of the 132 neighbourhoods within Birmingham based on the risk of violence in that neighbourhood, the higher the score, the higher the risk of violence. Castle Vale is the third highest risk, Perry Common; seventh, Lozells West; twelfth, and Erdington Town; seventeenth.

The West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit uses the mental health index as an indicator of the risk of violence in an area. Over 10% of young people had reported thinking of harming themselves and over 8% thinking of killing themselves. There is a need for mental health support in young adult age groups.



Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing

As highlighted in the VRU Index, interlinked factors impact on the risk of violence in an area. Mental health, wellbeing, and resilience appear multiple times directly and as a result of, the impact they have on a young person's ability to succeed in other areas of life like relationships and the world of work. Khulisa's work has a direct impact on improving the wellbeing and resilience of the young people who go through our programmes and we see an opportunity to support young people in these wards and boroughs.

In 2015, wards in North and West Birmingham such as Perry Common, Lozells, Castle Vale, and Erdington¹⁴ had the lowest ratings for resilience and wellbeing for 10-16 year olds.

Birmingham City Council have also recognised the need for more support for confidence and resilience.¹⁵ Mental health issues are also recognised as one of the primary predictors of risk for the young people involved in the criminal justice system in the West Midlands¹⁶.

On the topic of mental health, the pandemic has also had an impact, although less so on the mental health of those from affluent areas¹⁰. In a survey of 1733 young people in Birmingham 86.7% felt more stressed, 72.4% felt less optimistic, and 46.2% felt less safe since the pandemic¹¹.

Using the VRU interactive tool to look at the Small Area Mental Health Index scores (higher scores mean higher prevalence of mental health issues), there is great variation across Birmingham, but scores are high in a cluster of areas like Lozells West, Erdington Town, Perry Common, and in Castle Vale¹² the score is over double that of the average score for England¹³.

Local authorities acknowledge the need for investing in mental health and services for young people to improve their emotional wellbeing, but presently many resources focus solely on those young people attending school and accessing programmes in that environment.



Mental Health Youth Service Provision

There is however a gap in service provision to support young people's wellbeing beyond the school environment. The VRU for example provides community wide support, programmes such as their VR programme in schools, mentor programmes at primary and secondary schools, as well as work in a youth clubs,¹⁷ may mean that those over 18 do not have ready access to this kind of support.

Similarly, Birmingham Council highlights the need for schools and educational facilities to play a role in "boosting the resilience and confidence of young people and safeguarding their mental health in the long-term"¹⁸. There is little data available, and little support aimed specifically at 18-25-year-olds once out of education.

Criminal Activity in Birmingham

The West Midlands has the highest rates of 'Violence with Injury' and third highest rates of knife crime in England and Wales (VRU¹). **Cuts to government funding is cited as one reason for the increase in crime:** The rise comes at a time when police numbers are at their lowest, while £175 million has been cut from the force's budget. Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) David Jamieson said. ([Express and Star, 2020](#)).

The highest rates of violence and knife crime 2018-2020 are in central Birmingham and Digbeth². Other districts also stand out as higher than the rest of the Midlands for knife crime. In North Birmingham areas such as Erdington, Lozells, Perry Barr, and Handsworth³ stand out.

However, it is important to remember that this mapping is based only on crimes reported to the police.



Lozells, Aston and Handsworth experience above average rates of serious violence compared to the rest of Birmingham⁴, with a hotspot of knife crime along the A41 road running through the west of Birmingham⁵.

Possession of weapons in Lozells is double that of the average rate for England as a whole⁵ and this report considered poverty to be the greatest determinant of violence or risk of violence in an area⁶.

What Percentage of Crimes are Committed in Each Ward?

WARD	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Grand Total
Birmingham West	24.44%	26.62%	25.51%	25.46%	24.78%	25.20%	25.73%	26.02%	25.46%	25.82%	25.17%	25.52%
Birmingham East	19.56%	18.08%	17.21%	17.68%	17.72%	17.42%	17.89%	17.41%	17.67%	18.36%	18.12%	17.92%
Coventry	14.25%	13.05%	12.86%	12.45%	12.29%	11.60%	11.12%	11.01%	11.01%	10.97%	10.89%	11.95%
Sandwell	10.64%	11.07%	10.51%	10.65%	10.75%	10.78%	11.12%	11.37%	11.48%	10.94%	11.25%	10.97%
Walsall	8.31%	10.07%	9.21%	9.13%	9.69%	10.12%	9.19%	9.34%	9.40%	9.25%	9.53%	9.36%
Dudley	9.42%	8.25%	8.22%	8.07%	8.73%	9.13%	9.12%	9.11%	9.10%	8.95%	9.22%	8.85%
Wolverhampton	5.91%	5.69%	9.84%	9.66%	9.55%	9.30%	9.41%	9.03%	9.67%	9.60%	9.24%	8.80%
Solihull	7.48%	7.17%	6.63%	6.90%	6.48%	6.46%	6.43%	6.70%	6.21%	6.11%	6.57%	6.63%



Young People in the Criminal Justice System

A few factors specific to youth crime in Birmingham have been identified.

Offender profile

- National figures show offending peaking at age 17, with a decrease thereafter. In Birmingham local figures show a peak at 16 years for both young men and women.
- Offending remains a predominantly male activity. Young men accounted for 86.4% of crimes. ([Birmingham City Council, Youth Justice Strategic Plan, 2018-19](#))

High first-time youth justice system entrant rate

- The rate of young people entering the into the criminal justice system by receiving their first conviction or youth caution is 351 per 100,000 compared to the England and Wales rate of 214.
- 80% of entrants are aged 15-17 compared to a national average of 77% for this age group. ([HM Inspectorate of Probation Report, 2020](#))

However, we see lower rates of reoffending based on the most recent published data, since April 2015, the rates of reoffending have been consistently lower than the England and Wales average.

([HM Inspectorate of Probation Report, 2020](#))



Birmingham HMP – Environment

- The 2021 HM Chief Inspector report on HMP Birmingham reported concerns about the wellbeing of prisoners.

“The majority did not receive any regular meaningful contact from staff unless they were in crisis. We were concerned that the gradual deterioration of prisoners could go unnoticed due to the lack of meaningful welfare checks or contact with staff.”



- Good practice: The prison had created the ‘wellbeing navigators’ support scheme, a good initiative in which trained prisoners provided mental health ‘first aid’ to their peers. (2021 HMI Chief Inspector)
- Violence had decreased since March 2020 (during covid), and serious incidents had fallen, but the prison does not identify ‘violent incidents’ as ‘serious incidents’.
- Use of force had risen and was higher than similar prisons. There had been 451 incidents of use of force in the previous six months, which was a 50% increase on the six months to March 2020. ([2021 HMI Chief Inspector report](#))
- Self-harm increasing – prisoner self-harm had reduced in the early stages of the restricted regime, but incidents had risen to previous levels in June 2020, averaging 73 incidents a month, which was higher than similar prisons. ([2021 HMI Chief Inspector report](#))
- Social visits had been reintroduced in July 2020 but were stopped again in November and had not resumed since as the prison had been designated a COVID-19 outbreak site.



Partnership Engagement

We are grateful to all the community groups, charities, and agencies who took part in our research, shared their experiences and insights, and took time out to take part in our interviews.

These included:

- Beatbreaks
- Birmingham Children's Trust
- Grace Foundation
- Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid
- Centre for Justice Innovation
- Preparation for Adulthood
- Prince's Trust
- Redthread
- Jonah's project
- West Midlands Police
- West Midlands Police and Crime Commission
- West Midlands VRU
- YMCA Birmingham.



What we learnt from regional partners...

"I see a lot of young people involved in gang activities, a lot of county lines, a lot of CSE... some feel they have no other opportunities... A generational trauma and inherited attitude... More earlier interventions are needed to limit the high levels of violence we see in 18-25 year olds" **WMPC School link officer**



"Interventions need to take place sooner rather than later"
Preparation for adulthood



"We've seen postcode wars increase, with OCGs running areas of the city" **Red Thread**



"Criminal Justice System provides a lot of support but once a sentence is completed the services stop" **Preparation for adulthood**



"We see so many young people, as all the support disappears"
Preparation for adulthood



*"Many services have shut down or are no longer face to face"
"Our internal study has shown that our young people don't like seeing themselves on camera, if they don't like how they look then online meetings makes them feel worse"*
Birmingham Women's aid Residential for 16-25



"Organisations working with young people need to be more connected... An office with multiple support agencies under one roof... no retelling of their story for a young person... I want everyone to have a community hug" **Jonah's Project**





Partner Case Study

Redthread

Redthread are a youth work charity aiming to support and enable young people to lead healthy, safe, and happy lives. They embed youth workers within health settings.

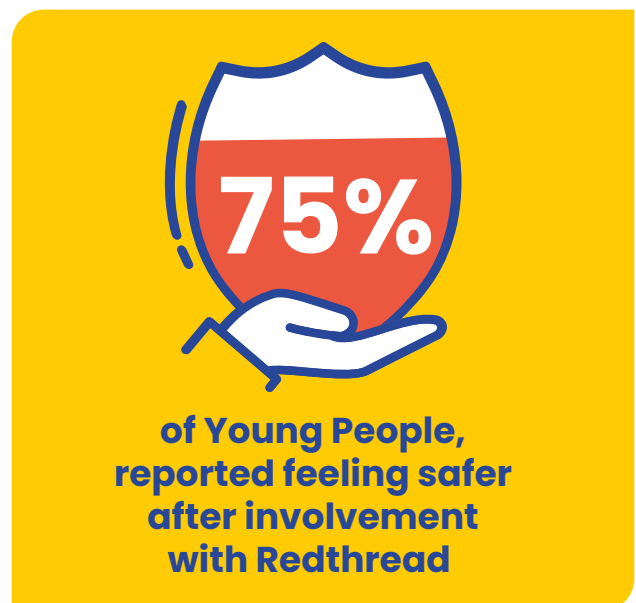
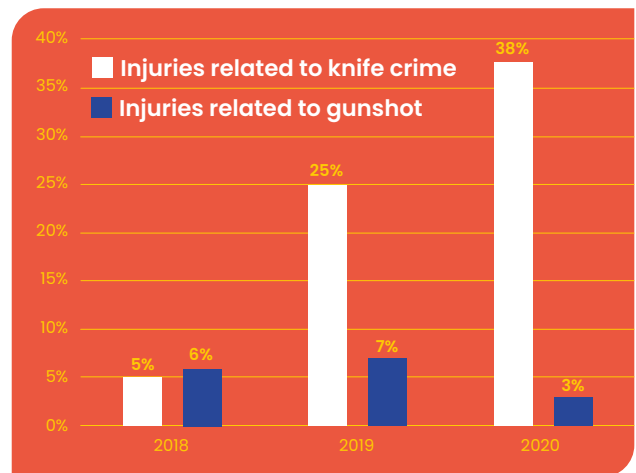
In the past 3 years Redthread have worked with a total of 502 young people across Birmingham.

Injuries related to knife crime have risen sharply from 5% in 2018 to 38% in 2020. In comparison injuries from guns have halved from 6% to 3%.

Redthread have also seen a decrease in referrals from young women, with rate of referrals of young women falling from 44% to 18% in 2020.

Knife crime in Birmingham appears to be becoming more of a gendered issue, relating to the status and transition of young men into adulthood in particular.

Where referrals have been successfully made to Redthread's programme the young people they work with have felt significantly safer after receiving support. 75% report feeling safer after involvement with Redthread.



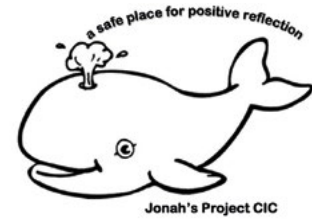
Partnership potential

- Trauma-informed training with staff
- Sign-posting to Khulisa or other partners Khulisa works with.



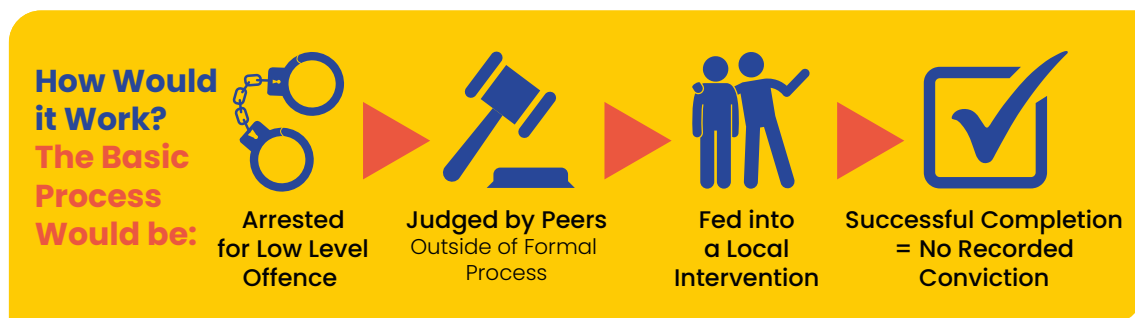
Partner Case Study

Jonah's Project



Jonah's Project is a community interest company that provides services to young people aged 11-25 years, who are convicted, involved in, or at risk of, criminal activity. Its tagline is "a safe place for positive reflection". It offers services including; mentoring, employability skills, enterprise skills, education, advice, and guidance.

Jonah's Project are also working on establishing an out of court disposal based in Birmingham. The court disposal system includes peer hearings to reduce low level crime, gang or anti-social behaviour offences by using a collaborative problem-solving approach to crime.



Working with statutory bodies, communities, grassroots companies, faith-based groups, businesses, and most importantly with young people leading from the front, the peer hearing endeavours to hold the young people to account, addressing the underlying factors that can lead to criminal behaviour, improve the quality of life in local communities and increase public confidence in the youth justice system.

Partnership potential

- Khulisa invited to contribute to round table discussions where the WMPCC is also involved.
- Potential shared office space in Birmingham with Jonah's project.
- Long-term potential to influence and develop partnership work around the out of court disposal programme, supporting young people to make changes in their lives post conviction.



Partner Case Study

YMCA Birmingham

The YMCA in Birmingham manage three sites which provide housing to young people. They also run two nurseries and a social enterprise cafe. Sites are based in Erdington, Aston & Northfields and cater to older residents too (25 years plus).

We interviewed the lead tenant involvement officer at the Orchard site which has 82 spaces for young people aged 16-25.

They were candid that they were over capacity with currently 91 residents, 30% mothers with children. Each unit is a one bed yet they have some mothers with two children.

Their biggest issues are regular drug use by residents, the ability of residents to move on into secure housing or gain employment, current or ex-relationships. For example, a lot of male partners are banned from accessing the site due to abusive relationships and gang involvement.

Current services are fairly light touch and do not specifically support emotional well being or mental health. They offer life coaching (but stretched between 3 coaches), weekly cooking sessions and monthly trips out to encourage social cohesion in the residents. There was little support for residents with their social and emotional well being, to reflect upon their backgrounds, and why they were struggling in the first place.

Partnership potential

- Social and emotional wellbeing course for residents and trauma training for the staff.
- Discussed a need for support for staff to address compassion fatigue.
- Discussed introductions to other organisations working with similar cohorts in the areas e.g. Trident Reach.



Conclusions and Next Steps

The study highlights not only some barriers and gaps in services provision for 18–25 year olds, but also potential solutions which came out of our interviews with local community-based organisations and current services.

In Summary

Birmingham is an area with a high youth population and a growing knife crime problem.

Mental health and wellbeing is tracked as an indicator to violence, and wellbeing rates are low in a number of Birmingham wards, particularly Perry Common, Lozells, Castle Vale, and Erdington.

These areas are not only locally recognised as deprived or ranking low on wellbeing indexes, but they have also been identified as some of the most deprived nationally.

Service provision:

Where services are available for young people, they are often linked to their school or educational provider, or probation or other criminal justice provider. However, some young people are struggling to access support until they reach crisis point, be it physical, psychological, or both.

Solutions to these problems, based on our interviews across the sector could be;

- For services to be centralised and easily accessible to young people.
- For services to reach young people early on (both in age, and situation), and crucially to offer pathways of support beyond school years.
- For specific community interventions to be designed for those who are already deemed 'too old' or who are out of education.



Next Steps

- Khulisa will be working with partners identified in the interviews to offer half-day trauma training opportunities to their staff.
- Khulisa will work with Centre for Justice Innovation on the findings of their study of a similar cohort to discuss cross over and similarities in the findings.
- Khulisa will engage smaller local community organisations and youth centres to offer support beyond the school environment.
- Through our relationships with school liaison officers, we will look to pilot our flagship Face It programme once we have built more solid relationships in the area. Where possible we will seek to focus on the 16 plus age range, and use our knowledge of working in colleges to support this.
- Khulisa will re-engage with HMP Birmingham, offering trauma training to its staff, and a small programme of Silence the Violence to a group of eight inmates.
- We have joined the West Midlands Trauma-Informed Coalition, chaired by Public Health, a strategic group set up to increase the understanding, responses to, and resources given to trauma and its impact. Spanning statutory (VRU, Children's and Adults Social Care, criminal justice) third sector and possibly private sector, this group is a coalition highlighting the need for more psychologically-responsive work across the region. We have been involved in the development of the model that is to be applied to the region. This is co-chaired by academic Dr Alex Chard.
- Khulisa is also a member of practice working groups. These working groups go into more detail, co-designing the model from which the implementation of systemic trauma-informed change will come, highlighting successes and challenges in our current methodology, and ultimately culminating in the best practice Khulisa wants to embed.



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