

# Summary of the Understanding the North Wales without Violence Strategy: Voluntary and Community Sector Webinars

## Background

The [Serious Violence Duty](#) commenced in January 2023 and requires public sector organisations to collaborate and plan to prevent and reduce serious violence in their local area. In Autumn 2023, Crest Advisory supported partners from the specified authorities across North Wales to develop a strategy, North Wales without Violence, to guide the response to serious violence across the region.

The voluntary and community sector (VCS) is a key partner in supporting the development and implementation of the North Wales without Violence strategy. In Spring 2024 Crest Advisory hosted two webinars to support the voluntary and community sector to understand the strategy and its priorities. We also discussed how the VCS and other partners in North Wales can work together to deliver an effective response to serious violence.

The webinar was attended by partners working in the VCS in North Wales, as well as representatives from the North Wales OPCC and other specified authorities.

## Summary of the workshops

In this section we have summarised the points made by partners across the two workshops. We have also identified where there may be opportunities for further engagement with the VCS to support the delivery of the North Wales without Violence strategy.

### 1. Experiences of serious violence in North Wales

- **A notable increase in violence within school and community settings was cited** by a representative from Conwy County Borough Council, particularly among young people in school settings. The stakeholder believed that this was due to a lack of resilience within the school environment, and emotional instability among children. Whilst the stakeholder wasn't sure exactly what was causing this, they felt that it would be important to examine this perceived increase as they felt it was not a problem unique to Conwy.

- **Similarly, a trend of increased serious violence among young people, particularly children in years 7, 8, and 9 in both school and community settings was identified** by a representative from Wrexham County Borough Council. They spotted this trend while facilitating a Safer Streets engagement programme with Groundwork North Wales. The stakeholder thought that this could be due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social development of children and young people.
- **Anecdotal evidence of young people arranging to meet up for fights,** typically away from areas where they may be witnessed by adults or CCTV was noted by a VCS representative. A stakeholder from The Venture, Wrexham noted incidents where young people had arranged to “jump” another person, out of sight of potential witnesses. He had also caught glimpses of violent content on children’s phones. The stakeholder felt that schools could do more to confront these issues.
- **An increase in domestic abuse and acts of violence directed towards women and girls after the COVID-19 pandemic was highlighted** by a stakeholder. Through the Safer Streets Fund, the stakeholder was able to facilitate sporting activities (Taekwaondo) and museum visits for these young women and girls, as well as providing other means of support.
- It was put forward that the prevalence of violence against women and girls, as indicated by statistics on sexual violence and domestic abuse, has likely always existed. A representative from North Wales Police suggested that improvements in police recording methods and **initiatives such as the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law) have been effective in encouraging victims to report cases** and are further shedding light on these crimes.
- **The link between deprivation and serious violence highlighted in the SNA was also recognised by stakeholders.** A representative from Welsh Women’s Aid noted their view that there is a strong link between deprivation and increased perpetration of violence against women and girls.
- **Substance misuse, and its relationship with crime, was highlighted.** A representative from the Substance Misuse Area Planning Board for North Wales recognised that North Wales is generally more rural and therefore not facing the same issues with serious violence that some urban areas in England and Wales are. However, they emphasised that the region does need to be more prepared to deal with future incidents. The stakeholder felt that identifying issues, and making people feel more comfortable to come forward about serious violence was key. They also highlighted the role of substance misuse, stating that the

vast majority of serious violence in the region was linked in some way to controlled drugs and alcohol.

- **Those drawn into crime appeared to be increasingly younger in age.** A stakeholder from Adferiad attributed this in part to county lines and related substance misuse. They felt that school settings would be appropriate sites to implement interventions for young people, however, resource limitations meant that deploying them was particularly difficult.
- **A correlation between substance misuse, criminal behaviour, and neurodiversity was noted** by a representative from The Venture, Wrexham. They felt that the lack of services aimed at neurodiversity may leave vulnerable young people unsupported. Similarly, the loss of youth work provision and centres is likely to be linked to the increases in youth violence.

## 2. The VCS can offer important support to partners to promote contextual safeguarding to work with children and young people vulnerable to exploitation and/or modern slavery

- **The VCS can help individuals who may be missed by specified authorities.** A representative from the North Wales Victim Help Centre explained that the Children and Young People Caseworker works with victims who can't access the National Referral Mechanism. The stakeholder noted that, in response to a rise in the number of children affected by or at risk of exploitation or modern slavery, the caseworker has been delivering work in school and educational settings where children feel safer. In the sessions they discuss issues including cyberharms, cyberbullying and the risk of sexual exploitation. Information is shared with the OPCC who commissioned the project.  
→ **Opportunity:** information could be shared with other partners beyond the OPCC by the North Wales Victims Help Centre.
- **The VCS can support the tailoring of interventions.** A representative from the Substance Misuse Area Planning Board for North Wales noted that the VCS has been intrinsic in ensuring that intervention programmes are appropriately tailored to local contexts. For example, practitioners can help with the identification of young people who are involved in county lines and refer them to relevant partners.
- **VCS practitioners can deliver interventions and identify vulnerable CYP.** A representative from Adferiad highlighted the Don't Touch - Tell! preventative education programme delivered to every primary school pupil in North Wales (ages four to 11). The programme educates children about the dangers of drugs

and alcohol. The programme is delivered by professional performers, delivered in a way that is accessible and interesting for children. These experienced performers can pick up on potentially vulnerable children and refer them to Healthy School Coordinators who will focus interventions on the whole class rather than the individual child. This creates resilience across the class rather than solely within the individual.

- **VCS practitioners can assist specified authorities in the implementation of programmes which support CYP vulnerable to exploitation.** A representative from Conwy County Borough Council explained that youth support workers were placed in schools to identify and assist vulnerable or potential victims. Youth Service workers are also placed in temporary accommodation settings for vulnerable CYP. Information on these individuals is then shared in a contextual safeguarding group comprising representatives from various services. Based on this intelligence, outreach programs are run to engage with these vulnerable young people and direct them to services. The VCS can be involved in many of the stages of this journey, with the ultimate aim being to build relationships and resilience against exploitation through youth club activities.
- **However, uncertainty about the meaning of contextual safeguarding among some practitioners may be limiting their ability to engage with the priority and support partners.** A representative from The Venture, Wrexham noted that some practitioners are uncertain about the definition of contextual safeguarding. Training so far has been “England-centre” which is somewhat inappropriate for the context of North Wales. Consequently, it is difficult to implement, particularly with current funding limitations.  
→ **Opportunity:** to develop North Wales-focused training for practitioners on contextual safeguarding for children and young people.

### **3. Building a preventative approach in North Wales through an understanding of risk, adverse childhood experiences and trauma**

- **Within the VCS, there is some level of understanding regarding trauma-informed practice. However, resource limitations hamper efforts to operate in a trauma-informed way.** A representative from The Venture, Wrexham knew of features such as the TrACE framework, however, resource limitations meant that it was difficult to implement. To an extent, practitioners are already utilising TIP, in that they are cognisant of neurodevelopmental conditions and ACEs when assessing individuals. However, experienced staff face difficulties in disseminating the skills and knowledge to less experienced colleagues due to resource constraints.

→ **Opportunity:** Free training and the provision of spaces to explore these complex subjects would benefit third sector organisations, as well as the CYP who use their services.

- **A representative from Welsh Women's Aid explained how their organisation and partners try to operate in a trauma-informed way**, in that they focus on long term recovery and not just the immediate crisis at hand. Lives cannot be rebuilt overnight, nor can trauma be mitigated overnight. However, funding for long term recovery and trauma support is limited.

#### **4. The voluntary and community sector can support partners in the development and implementation of prevention and intervention strategies around violence against women and girls, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV)**

- **Programmes and tools developed by the VCS can encourage victims of crime to come forward.** A representative from Welsh Women's Aid noted that they have developed a range of discussion tools which can be used to engage with children and young people to talk about issues that matter to them. These tools were co-produced by young people who also provided feedback on the tools once they were implemented. In North Wales, their domestic abuse services are engaged in prevention and early prevention. One of their adult, community-based interventions aimed at empowering individuals resulting in first time disclosure rates of around 30%. The stakeholder interpreted these results to mean that the project had been successful in creating a space where people felt comfortable to disclose instances of abuse and serious violence.  
→ **Opportunity:** to share discussion tools which can be used to engage with children and young people to talk about issues in their community that matter to them.
- **VCS workers with lived experience are crucial for encouraging engagement from CYP.** A representative from North Wales Police highlighted the success of the Young Person's Day, a partnership involving local authorities, law enforcement and VCS organisations. One aspect of the event saw Matt Brown, co-founder and author of She Is Not Your Rehab, discuss issues surrounding anti-violence, positive masculinity and healthy relationships with young men and boys. Those involved were seemingly more comfortable to discuss these issues with someone who they felt could understand them, and with whom they could relate.
- **Engaging events can be a valuable opportunity to reach young people and families and signpost them to appropriate services.** Representatives noted how valuable it was to have Matt Brown to engage with the children.

Listening to Matt opened up a discussion about other topics related to serious violence, which encouraged children to engage with some of the different youth services that had stalls at the event. This was a great opportunity to engage with young people and families and signpost them towards these additional services.

## 5. The role of service user feedback in improving services

- **Obtaining feedback from service users is a crucial but underutilised tool.** A representative from the Substance Misuse Area Planning Board for North Wales felt that more feedback was needed between partners and service users. For example, obtaining feedback from service users as to their experience with services, as well as feedback given to the service users regarding changes to services based on service user feedback to demonstrate that they were being listened to. The stakeholder felt that this was an important step as it would create more positive perceptions of these services and the partnerships that facilitate them, thereby encouraging greater levels of engagement.  
→ **Opportunity:** to include service users in monitoring and evaluation of services to tackle serious violence.
- **Some services use this approach already.** A partner from Adferiad, North Wales highlighted Caniad, which enables individuals with lived experience of issues such as addiction and mental health challenges to have a voice. Their experiences can be used to improve local services, making them more effective. The stakeholder felt that there should be a greater emphasis on service user feedback, stating that it is crucial for improving how victims are engaged with and how services support them.
- **However, partners noted that there are challenges to obtaining feedback.** A stakeholder from the Substance Misuse Area Planning Board for North Wales recognised that, while they are consistently trying to obtain feedback from service users, perhaps more could be done to increase the number of individuals they are speaking to. The stakeholder recognised that it can be very difficult for victims to speak up about their experiences, so efforts should be made to make people feel more comfortable to speak.  
→ **Opportunity:** develop approaches to support victims of serious violence to feedback on their experiences of using support services.

## 6. Good communication and collaboration between partners can lead to more effective interventions against serious crime

- **Greater communication and transfer of information between partners, and with young people, is key to combating serious violence.** This can be

enabled through events such as youth participation days held in Wrexham city centre. A representative from Caia Park Partnership Ltd in Wrexham partners with the police and youth justice services to run these events. Additionally, Caia Parks Partnership Ltd. set up a youth group in response to ASB behaviour, aligning female youth support workers with young women and girls who have suffered physical and domestic abuse.

- **Transferring knowledge between the VCS and strategic partners was deemed to be important** by participants of the webinar. A representative from Welsh Women's Aid said that through their work with victims, Welsh Women's Aid gains invaluable insights, which can then be relayed to professionals through training programmes such as Trusted Professional. This enables professionals (university staff, police, fire and rescue services) to better recognise the signs of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, respond appropriately to disclosures, and refer survivors and perpetrators to specialist support services. The stakeholder recognised that there is a lot more to do in terms of transferring knowledge between partners to facilitate a whole systems approach to tackling serious violence.
- **Regular meetings between partners are critical for sharing information.** A representative from Youth Cymru highlighted monthly networking meetings between partners and local community members, where common themes or challenges in their fields are discussed. These meetings offer a space where successful projects from one area can be shared with organisations in other areas.
- **Organisations should look to collaborate on projects where possible.** A representative from Caia Park Partnership Ltd in Wrexham pointed out that shared prosperity funds/bigger funding buckets which are available when groups work together on projects. Multiple groups working on one project can reduce duplication and mean that resources are used more efficiently.  
→ **Opportunity:** identify opportunities for joint bidding for resources to fund serious violence prevention work.
- It was expressed by some that **certain partners were not communicating effectively.** A representative from The Venture, Wrexham felt that schools were not adequately communicating the seemingly increasing incidents of serious violence they were experiencing to specified authorities or third sector organisations. They felt that a more clear channel of communication would be beneficial for not only the people working with CYP, but also the CYP themselves.

## 7. Coordination of resources can support the effective delivery of initiatives to tackle serious violence

- With funding being limited, **the VCS and public authorities must be more strategic, mapping out what works best and how resources can be used more efficiently.** A representative from the OPCC highlighted the importance of different partners working together and sharing information. Crimes and social issues are often interconnected (i.e., children running away from home due to domestic abuse or sexual violence), so projects and partners involved must consider this and work collaboratively to address said issues.
- **The way that funding is provided may be discouraging coordination.** A representative from the Substance Misuse Area Planning Board for North Wales argued that the way funding was made available was an issue. Collaboration between partners is key to the development and implementation of effective interventions, however, he felt that the application process for funding often necessitated competition between partners, which ultimately hindered collaboration. The stakeholder wants the Welsh and UK governments to facilitate better collaboration, rather than the application process being a competitive venture.
- **When commissioning projects, it is key to first make sure that the right skills and experience are in place,** otherwise resources are wasted, and the goals of the projects are unlikely to be achieved. A stakeholder from Wrexham County Borough Council explained that broader community projects where VCS and strategic partners work collaboratively can be great when organised and delivered effectively, however, grassroots organisations often don't have the right skill sets or experience to deal with complex issues.
- **Opportunities to discuss specific local serious violence issues are essential to identify ways to address the problems.** A representative explained that in the past, North Wales Police facilitated monthly meetings regarding antisocial behaviour and crime issues. The police, fire service, schools and volunteer organisations were all involved. They discussed potential solutions, outlining specific roles for individual agencies, so that every group was able to contribute to tackling ASB and criminal issues. The stakeholder said that currently, collaboration between partners is limited, leading to a scattergun approach and duplication of work. Furthermore, he felt there was a lack of focus on “pockets of ASB” outside of Wrexham city centre.

→ **Opportunity:** to organise specialist meetings bringing partners together to discuss specific local issues such as ASB. These meetings should include relevant specified authorities and VCS representatives.



- **Failure to coordinate can limit the impact of programmes, even if they are well-designed.** Whilst a representative from Youth Cymru felt that the Young Person's Day was engaging and well attended, many more CYP and professionals could have attended if there was better communication between partners, and resources to get CYP to the event.  
→ **Opportunity:** Future events could perhaps be organised by local authorities with the assistance of the VCS.
- **Holistic care for victims of serious violent crime requires good coordination from a range of partners.** A representative from We Mind the Gap, Wrexham reflected on the complexities of supporting victims in the context of North Wales. For example, supporting DA victims in rural settings was difficult. There were limited places where the victim could be moved to once they were removed from the setting where the offences took place. Removing from this setting often meant the loss of their support network, as well as limited access to other basic needs.  
→ **Opportunity:** there is a need for partners to communicate and collaborate to ensure a more holistic approach to care.

## 8. The specified authorities have a role to play in supporting the VCS to engage with the delivery of the North Wales without Violence strategy

- **Lead projects consisting of a range of partners.** VCS organisations often lack the experience and capacity to initiate and lead major projects consisting of multiple partners. The third sector is willing to contribute to major projects, but it is likely that specified authorities will need to play the role of the organiser.
- **Support VCS partners when they are dealing with complex or dangerous situations.** Third sector practitioners noted occasions where they felt unable to adequately deal with hazardous or complicated situations. For instance, they face difficulties dealing with the rise of serious violence within schools. These practitioners emphasised the necessity of stronger support from the police in these situations.
- **Facilitate regular meetings between partners.** Some VCS practitioners stated that regular meetings between partners would be beneficial to countering serious violence. However, they lacked a central body with the resources to accommodate such meetings. It was felt that specified bodies such as the police could fulfil this role.

## Attendees

**45 people** joined the webinars across the two days. We have included a list of attendees below.

**Workshop 1:** Monday 8th April, 2024 to 11:00am to 12:30pm

Total: 36 attendees

1. Katherine Prince (Avow, Wrexham)
2. Aled Jones-Griffith (Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, North Wales)
3. Claire McGrady (Local Policing, North Wales Police)
4. Neal Cockerton (Flintshire County Council)
5. Laura Johns (BCUHB - Child & Adolescent Health, NHS Wales)
6. Jonathan Stumpp (Caia Park Partnership Ltd., Wrexham)
7. Maggie Pierce (OPCC, North Wales Police)
8. Owen Preece (Crime Services, North Wales Police)
9. Marianne Foster (Digartref, Anglesey)
10. Chris Gledhill (Conwy County Borough Council)
11. Sandra Lynne Thomas (Cyngor Gwynedd)
12. Sam Garrod (Digartref, Anglesey)
13. Kevin Jones (North Wales Fire and Rescue Service)
14. Leanne Jeffreys (WCD Young Carers, North Wales)
15. Claire Parry (Local Policing, North Wales Police)
16. Llion Williams (Gwynedd County Council)
17. Sioned McQuilling (Local Policing, North Wales Police)
18. Gerwyn Davies (Wrexham County Borough Council)
19. Donna Palmer (Coleg Cambria, North Wales)
20. Shannon Lacey (Youth Cymru)
21. Ewan Russell (Digartref, Anglesey)
22. Nia Backhouse (Isle of Anglesey County Council)
23. Tricia Jones (Wrexham County Borough Council)
24. Rachel Smith (Isle of Anglesey County Council)
25. Emily Reddy (Wrexham County Borough Council)
26. David Haydock (Local Policing, North Wales Police)
27. Fiona Banks (Isle of Anglesey County Council)
28. Mererid Thomas (Isle of Anglesey County Council)
29. Deb Critchley (Welsh Women's Aid, North Wales)
30. Lorna Crawshaw (Groundwork North Wales)
31. Ann Postle (Isle of Anglesey County Council)
32. Jess Rees (North Wales Victim Help Centre)
33. Rachel Simmonds (Conwy County Borough Council)
34. Andrew D Sinclair (Isle of Anglesey County Council)

35. Leslie Critchlow-Hughes (Caia Park Partnership Ltd., Wrexham)
36. Diane Jones (OPCC, North Wales Police)

**Workshop 2:** Tuesday 9th April, 2024 - 11:00am to 12:30pm

Total: 11 attendees

1. Claire Jones (Adferiad, North Wales)
2. Diane Jones (OPCC, North Wales Police)
3. Julie Done (We Mind the Gap, Wrexham)
4. Linda Platt (The Venture, Wrexham)
5. Manon Williams (Ysgol Niwbwrch, Anglesey)
6. Maggie Pierce (Serious Violence Team, North Wales Police)
7. Mannon Emyr Trappe (Gwynedd County Council)
8. Paul Firth (Substance Misuse Area Planning Board for North Wales)
9. Siôn Edwards (The Venture, Wrexham)
10. Gwyn P. Roberts (North Wales Fire and Rescue Service)
11. Andrew Gammon (North Wales Adolescent Service, Wrexham)