

Violence Reduction Partnership

Evaluation Strategy



Delivered by

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Foreword

“What can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence.”

Evaluation and evidence-based philosophies have been studied and theorised for many years, but it is crucial that we apply the learning in the right way and at the right times.

When it comes to tackling serious violence, the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) has developed a strong commitment to this approach, which is ultimately benefitting our communities.

From commissioning services to assessing the effectiveness of our interventions and programmes, we have adopted a framework that starts from the facts.

This means being at the forefront of innovation and practices, allowing us to deliver a portfolio of work in the confidence it will have a genuine impact.

It also gives us permission to try new things, testing new ground based on a robust foundation of proof.

We can then share those outcomes, so others can determine what works and what doesn't.

Our Theory of Change and Monitoring Toolkit and the development of our data dashboard are great examples of the progress we have made.

Truly embracing a culture of evidence and evaluation can offer timely and accurate intelligence. This can rapidly and precisely deploy resources to proactively prevent and respond to serious violence.

It must therefore remain at the heart of what we do, ensuring continuous improvement across our network of partners.



Director of the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Partnership, Det Ch Supt Lee Berry

West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Partnership: Commitment to Evaluation and Evidence-Based Practice

The West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) is committed to working with partners and organisations across the county to foster a culture of evaluation and evidence-based practice. Our goal is to ensure that commissioned services and programmes are informed by the best available evidence and that we use proven approaches to achieve meaningful, long-term reductions in violence.

Using Evidence to Guide Commissioning

We are committed to commissioning services that are supported by robust evidence, using best practice resources such as the Youth Endowment Fund's [What Works Toolkit](#). By utilising such resources, we aim to prioritise interventions that are proven to work, ensuring the most effective use of available resources. This approach allows us to:

- **Cautiously consider unproven strategies:** such as knife education programmes, trauma-informed practice training, and police presence in schools. While these approaches may show promise, they require careful testing and evaluation before widespread adoption.
- **Avoid harmful approaches:** such as prison awareness programmes, which research has shown can cause harm.

We believe resources are best spent on evidence-based strategies that deliver positive outcomes.

Embedding Evaluation to Build the Evidence Base

The VRP is expected to contribute both to the local and national evidence base through our own evaluations. By consistently evaluating our work, we will generate valuable insights that can guide future investment and decision-making.

Our [Theory of Change and Evaluation Toolkit](#) has been designed to ensure that evaluations add value to the existing evidence base. The toolkit will support our core members and organisations across the county in determining how best to allocate resources to achieve the greatest impact.

A Pathway for Evaluating Interventions

For interventions that are not currently supported by robust evidence of effectiveness, we have a clear ambition: over time, these interventions will progress through increasingly rigorous levels of evaluation (either led by the VRP or by another identified party). Our aim is for each intervention to reach a robust level of evaluation, such as level 4 on the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale or its equivalent.

We recognise that not every intervention requires new evaluation if it has already undergone robust assessment elsewhere and is being replicated in the same conditions. In those cases, we will rely on existing evidence while focusing our efforts on generating new evidence for under-evaluated programmes.

By embedding evaluation into everything we do, we will ensure that our efforts lead to a sustainable reduction in violence and build a foundation of knowledge that benefits West Yorkshire and beyond.

Support

If you would like to discuss Theory of Change or Evaluation further, please contact the Knowledge Hub at WYVRP.KnowledgeHub@westyorks-ca.gov.uk

Our Principles of Evaluation

Purpose of Evaluation

- **Aim:** To ensure that all interventions are designed with a clear theory of change, effectively monitored, and rigorously evaluated to contribute to the reduction of violence.
- **Core Objective:** Guide investment, inform decision-making, and foster continuous improvement through systematic evaluation.

Principles of Evaluation

- **Built-In Evaluation:** Evaluation is to be embedded from the start of each project, not an afterthought, through the development of a clear theory of change and identification of key monitoring data.
- **Evidence-Driven:** Focus on interventions supported by existing evidence or those designed with evaluation pathways to generate new evidence.
- **Transparency:** Findings are shared to support local and national evidence bases and guide future strategies.

Theory of Change and Monitoring

- **Theory of Change:** Every intervention must begin with a clearly articulated theory of change that outlines the problem, target population, activities, risks, assumptions and expected outcomes. This ensures all stakeholders understand how and why an intervention is expected to work.
- **Monitoring Data:** At project inception, identify key metrics and data sources that will be monitored throughout the intervention. This ensures that data collection supports both ongoing performance management and final evaluation.

Evaluation Framework

- **Inputs:** Define resources, partnerships, and key activities based on the theory of change.
- **Outputs:** Measure direct deliverables such as participation numbers, sessions delivered, and initial reach.
- **Outcomes:** Track changes in participants' behaviour, attitudes, and the immediate social environment that reflect progress toward violence reduction.
- **Impact:** Assess the longer-term effect of the intervention on violence reduction or prevention across the community or targeted group.

Evaluation Methods

- **Quantitative Data:** Collect and analyse crime statistics, demographic data, and programme-specific metrics to measure scale and effectiveness.
- **Qualitative Data:** Gather narratives, interviews, and focus group data from participants and stakeholders to understand context, experiences, and perceived change.
- **Mixed Methods:** Use both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive evaluation.

Standards for Rigor

- **Pre-Evaluation Planning:** Ensure that the theory of change includes a pathway for rigorous evaluation, with identified monitoring data that aligns with short- and long-term goals.
- **Robustness:** Aim for evaluations to progress through levels of robustness, ideally reaching Level 3 or 4 on the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale*.
- **Iterative Evaluation:** For emerging or unproven interventions, develop a clear plan for progressively rigorous evaluation, from formative to summative assessments.

Learning and Improvement

- Continuous Feedback: Use evaluation findings, alongside real-time monitoring data, to refine interventions during implementation.
- Capacity Building: Provide training and [resources](#) for partners and staff on using theory of change and monitoring systems to integrate evaluation from the start.

Use of Findings

- Evidence-Based Decision Making: Leverage insights from evaluations to refine programme designs, influence funding allocation, and inform commissioning processes.
- Dissemination: Share lessons learned and results with local, regional, and national stakeholders to build a comprehensive understanding of what works in violence reduction.

*Maryland Scientific Methods Scale (SMS)

The SMS is a tool used to assess the quality and rigor of evaluations. It ranks studies based on their ability to determine whether an intervention caused the observed outcomes. The scale ranges from **Level 1** (Weakest) to **Level 5** (Strongest), with higher levels providing more confidence in the results.

- Level 1: Correlation Only
Describes what happened, but doesn't compare it to anything else – no real proof that the intervention caused the result
- Level 2: Before and after comparison
Compares outcomes before and after the intervention in the same group but without comparing to a similar group that didn't receive the intervention
- Level 3: Comparison group
Compares an intervention group to a control group (that doesn't receive the intervention) but the groups are not randomly selected, so there still may be differences affecting the results
- Level 4: Matched comparison group
Uses a comparison group that is carefully matched to the intervention group (based on age, background, etc) making the groups more similar and increasing confidence that any changes are due to the intervention
- Level 5: Randomised controlled trial (RCT)
The gold standard! Participants are randomly assigned to either the intervention group or the control group, ensuring that any differences in outcomes are caused by the intervention