

THE GREATER MANCHESTER VIOLENCE REDUCTION UNIT

GREATER MANCHESTER NAVIGATOR PROJECT: EVALUATION REPORT



Dr Deborah Jump

Dr Paul Gray

Dr Kate Westwood

**August
2025**

Table of Contents

→	01	Executive Summary
		01 Background and purpose
		01 Key Findings
		03 Strategic and Operational Recommendations
		03 Conclusion
→	04	Rationale
→	04	Background
→	06	Research Question & Objectives
→	07	Research Design
→	07	Methodological Approach
→	07	Data Collection
→	08	Quantitative Data Analysis
		08 GM Navigator Custody Data Analysis
		09 GM Navigators Online Survey
		10 GM Navigators Baseline and Exit Questionnaire



12

Qualitative Findings

- 12** The stressful and unpredictable context of police custody
- 13** The need for independent advice, support and advocacy in custody
- 14** Long- Term Benefits of GM Navigators Outside of Police Custody
- 15** Case Study: Tom
- 16** Challenges in implementation and effectiveness of the pilot
- 18** Key Findings: Summary



19

Recommendations



21

References



23

Appendices

Executive Summary

Background and Purpose

The GM Navigators project places trained youth workers into police custody suites to support children and young people at the point of arrest. The pilot aimed to offer an independent, trauma-informed, and relationship-based intervention to help divert young people from further contact with the criminal justice system. This evaluation explored how the pilot was delivered in practice, what challenges arose, and how the initiative might be strategically and operationally improved.

Key Findings

Impact & Value of Navigator Role

- Professionals strongly affirmed the value of a youth work-based, relational approach, especially for young people facing trauma, stress, and marginalisation.
- Navigators built trusted relationships with young people and families at a teachable moment—acting as an independent advocate in the custody environment.
- The Navigator model shows clear potential to enhance multi-agency working, streamline referrals, and complement existing services such as Liaison and Diversion (L&D).

Systemic Scepticism and Change Fatigue

- Police officers voiced scepticism and fatigue around new initiatives. Many perceived the Navigator pilot as “just another programme,” reflecting broader public sector weariness due to constant policy and funding changes.
- Over time, as staff saw reduced reoffending or fewer returns to custody, attitudes began to shift more positively.

Barriers to Engagement in Custody Setting

- A major obstacle was the limited availability of Navigators within custody suites. Professionals consistently noted that Navigators were often unable to access key windows of opportunity—particularly when young people first enter custody, especially when young people may be more open to engagement.
- Many young people were only referred after being processed into custody, by which time trust was harder to build.
- Limits on a designated private space for Navigators to speak with young people also undermined the depth and quality of engagement, although this was addressed within the early stages of the project.

Issues of Discrimination and Legitimacy

- Concerns were raised by one member of staff regarding their legitimacy by custody staff. As a racialised member of the team this had a negative impact on their wellbeing.

Key Findings

Inconsistency in Police Support and Referrals

- High turnover among police staff in custody suites led to variability in support for the Navigator role. While some officers were highly collaborative, others were unaware of the referral process.
- Referral forms were often incomplete or inaccurate, limiting the ability of Navigators to follow up meaningfully. Examples included missing contact details or practical issues such as incorrect phone numbers given, resulting in missed opportunities.

Importance and Challenge of Lived Experience

- Employing Navigators with lived experience of the justice system was seen as hugely impactful in building credibility and trust with young people. However, vetting processes within police environments pose significant barriers to employing those with prior custodial histories. This tension between safeguarding and authenticity is unresolved and requires further exploration.

Strategic Challenges and Service Duplication

- Stakeholders highlighted a need for clarity of roles between Navigators and other professionals like L&D teams. There were concerns about overlapping services and confusion for young people facing multiple, uncoordinated points of contact.
- Considerations of data quality and accessibility of data sharing in custody is needed to avoid hindering strategic planning and help assess where Navigators were most effective or needed.



Strategic and Operational Recommendations

Operational Recommendations

- Increase availability in custody: Consider an on-call model so Navigators can be present during high-volume times and at more suites across GM.
- Strengthen custody suite integration: Allow Navigators to spend more time in custody to foster familiarity with police staff and ensure smoother referrals.
- Provide private spaces: Designate confidential rooms for Navigators to meet with young people, enabling more open and effective conversations.
- Improve information access: Grant Navigators access to systems like IOPS to better target support and understand young people's needs.

Strategic Recommendations

- Address barriers to lived experience recruitment: Explore alternative vetting models to enable people with relevant life experience to work safely and effectively in custody settings.
- Enhance data collection: Improve custody-level data on referral quality, engagement rates, and outcomes to support future evaluation and service development.
- Clarify strategic alignment with other services: Define how Navigators complement existing offers like L&D and Youth Justice teams to avoid duplication and ensure young people receive the most appropriate support.
- Expand Navigator deployment: Assess the potential for Navigators to be embedded at other key points in the youth justice journey—such as courts or health settings—for continuity of care.
- Invest in service longevity: Provide longer-term funding and strategic planning to allow for a more consistent and embedded Navigator presence across Greater Manchester.

Conclusion

Despite practical and systemic challenges, the GM Navigators project has demonstrated clear and compelling potential to offer meaningful support to young people at one of the most critical moments in their journey through the youth justice system. Participants strongly endorsed the relational, trauma-informed approach as distinct and valuable. However, for the model to fulfil its potential, improved integration, clearer role definition, and sustainable investment will be key. This evaluation not only documents the strengths and barriers of the pilot, but also lays the groundwork for scaling, strengthening, and strategically embedding the Navigator model across youth justice settings in Greater Manchester and beyond.

Rationale

The Greater Manchester Violence Reduction Unit Navigator Project is a Youth Led Violence Reduction project commissioned by Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) Violence Reduction Unit and is being delivered by Oasis Charity. In December 2020, the Greater Manchester Violence Reduction Unit commissioned a hospital-based 'Navigator' violence reduction pilot programme in four hospitals. The Navigator programme became operational in April 2021 and was initially funded until March 2022. Then it was recommissioned until March 2025, with further funding provided until March 2026. The original Navigator programme sought to support those young people (aged 10-25) who attend or have been admitted to an adult or paediatric Emergency Department with injuries or hospital ward resulting from violence. It aimed to offer support at a 'teachable moment', to help young people to cope and recover from their experiences, to prevent retaliation, the escalation of violence and / or repeat victimisation, and to reduce exploitation. Where on-going needs were identified by Navigators, the programme endeavoured to support young people in the community and refer them to other services for ongoing support.

The Greater Manchester Navigator Project (GMNP) was adapted in October 2021 to include working with young people in the community and in July 2024 to Custody. This involves adapting the same model and outcomes as the community pilot; however, the referral site is a custody suite in Greater Manchester. Greater Manchester Police make a referral to the Navigator's project with the young person's consent at point of arrest. This referral will be allocated to a 'Navigator' who will follow up with the referral in the community. The idea being that young people at risk of further offending will be mentored and supported to overcome this risk.

Background

There is scarce literature on mentoring schemes that specifically target custody as a point of diversion (Wong et al. 2023). However, evidence on mentoring in youth justice services indicates that placing youth-work trained professionals as navigators at point of arrest holds promise. By developing more effective referrals to multi-agency support networks and facilitating longer-term positive impacts on children's lives such as (a) reduction in reoffending (Tolan et al., 2013), (b) criminal behaviours (Raposa et al., 2019), and (c) increased levels of self-esteem (Armitage, Heyes and O'Leary, 2020) young people can be diverted into more positive activities.

The above evidence is based on recent reviews of the effectiveness of youth work interventions in United Kingdom, and North American hospital sites (Ellison et al., 2024; Dickson et al., 2023; Brice and Boyle, 2020), yet the evidence for similar outcomes being achieved in custody sites is limited. This evaluation report hopes to address some of the gaps in the evidence by providing a mixed method study of the GMNP over a one-year period. Schemes such as GMNP have been developed to help address children and young people's needs whilst supporting them to reduce or desist from offending, as broader evidence highlights the increasing interest in placing youth work-trained professionals at key intervention points or 'teachable moments' in the lives of young people at risk of or already involved in serious youth violence (SYV).

The concept of a 'teachable moment'—a period following crisis or trauma where an individual is more receptive to change—is well-established in public health and behavioural science (Lawson & Flocke, 2009; Glasgow et al., 1991). Several U.K and international studies highlight the potential for emergency departments and custody settings to become sites for such intervention.

For example, Dickson et al. (2023) found that young people engaging with hospital-based Violence Intervention Programmes (VIPs) following injury had significantly reduced re-attendance for violent incidents. Similarly, Wortley and Hagell (2021) argue for the use of youth workers in emergency departments to support access to services and capitalise on these ‘teachable moments.’ Indeed, the Greater Manchester VRU Hospital Navigator Pilot evaluation by Ellison et al. (2024) provides compelling UK-based evidence[1]. The study found statistically significant improvements in young people’s feelings of safety, well-being, and reduced involvement in violence among those who engaged with the project. Notably, hospital staff reported that Navigators played a critical role in building trust with vulnerable young people—often acting as a more accessible alternative to medical professionals. Indeed, youth workers are often identified by young people, parents, and multiagency staff as having the skills to bridge the gap between young people and professionals, therefore enabling communication and advocacy for young people’s needs (Marshall and Waring, 2021).

This evaluation sought to understand if the adapted GMNP could replicate similar findings in custody suites, yet wider evidence suggests that current inconsistencies in the abilities of police staff to correctly identify children’s needs, relay correct information, and signpost consistently/effectively to services has been witnessed nationally (HMIP, 2024). Recent research underscores the increased likelihood of young people having negative experiences with the police if they also experience social marginalisation (Howard League, 2024; HMICFRS, 2023; Skarlatidou et al., 2023), therefore presenting another potential barrier at point of arrest as young people’s historic mistrust of the police arguably prevents them from detailing the situations they face or the support they might need.

Arguably, this is because trusted relations between adults and young people can be tenuous, particularly in relation to police–youth relations. Further research indicates that marginalised young people often experience negative encounters with law enforcement, which diminishes their trust and willingness to engage (Skarlatidou et al., 2023; Howard League, 2024; HMICFRS, 2023). However, the College of Policing (2024) has acknowledged the importance of trusted roles in their learning on custody navigators, emphasising the need for navigators to be present both within custody settings and in the community.

Yet, challenges remain. Evaluations, such as Wong et al.’s (2023) feasibility study of the DIVERT programme, stress the difficulties of capturing robust data from youth in custody—many of whom do not consent to formal participation. This is echoed by Ellison et al. (2024), who note that informal advocacy by navigators for non-consenting participants is often significant but undocumented. Moreover, inconsistencies in police recognition of children’s needs at the point of arrest continue to undermine safeguarding (HMIP, 2024). Officers often fail to make timely and detailed referrals, underscoring the need for professionals embedded in custody who can assess, communicate, and act on children’s welfare and safeguarding concerns.

Youth workers also offer a distinct advantage in terms of relational practice. Marshall and Waring (2021) describe youth workers as “a vital link” between young people and professional teams, emphasising their role in building rapport, translating needs, and fostering engagement in ways that formal systems frequently fail to achieve. These findings are supported by international evidence, particularly from the US and Canada, where youth violence intervention programmes have shown promising outcomes in attitude change, service uptake, and reduction in high-risk behaviours (Brice & Boyle, 2020; Gaffney, Joliffe & White, 2021).

Despite the promise, sustainability and system readiness remain barriers. Ellison et al. (2024) point to the short-term nature of Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) funding and the need for embedded, long-term strategies.

Moreover, as Wortley and Hagell (2021) caution, the UK evidence base remains underdeveloped and often struggles to capture the nuanced and informal work that youth professionals carry out. While direct evaluations of custody-based youth work interventions remain limited, a growing body of literature from hospital settings, mentoring programmes, and public health research suggests that youth workers are uniquely placed to support young people at critical moments. Their relational approach, community credibility, and ability to advocate across systems offer a potential solution to the recognised shortcomings in current police-led responses. The integration of trained youth workers or navigators into custody suites could enhance multi-agency working, improve engagement, and help build the foundations for longer-term change. However, systematic evaluation, stable funding, and cultural shifts in policing and youth work practice are necessary to realise this potential.

Research Question & Objectives

This feasibility evaluation supports efforts within Greater Manchester to facilitate meaningful action that improves operational practice and therefore reduce instances where young people are entering the criminal justice system at point of arrest. The stated aim of the project is to work with those aged 10-25 years who are attending Manchester's Central Park and have been impacted by violence and are under investigation. Based on the logic model and ToC the overarching outcome of the feasibility evaluation was to enable young people to fulfill their potential and reduce the harms associated with violence (see appendix 1).

To carry out a rigorous feasibility evaluation the project team facilitated an initial workshop. Attendees including GMNP, Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and GMCA, alongside invited young people with lived experience of the project. The aim of the workshop was to meet the research objectives:

- **Co-produce a comprehensive understanding of the aims of the custody pilot with young people, practitioners and stakeholders**
- **Map current practice to understand barriers and enablers to the delivery of the pilot**
- **Identify what data- existing or additional- would be required to undertake an outcome evaluation of the pilot**
- **Design a Theory of Change (ToC) to reflect the findings of the feasibility evaluation**
- **Generate findings about perceived changes in outcomes to be directly attributed to the pilot**
- **Deliver evaluation: an exploration of the workings of the custody pilot across Greater Manchester**
- **Advise on the feasibility study for an impact evaluation: an exploration of the data, existing or additional to evaluate the impact of the programme if scaled up.**
- **Provide an evaluation report and contributed to reference and expert group meetings when appropriate.**

Research Design

We explored any relevant documents written previously about the pilot to understand the purpose and the agreed processes in the delivery. We also consulted any documents relating to the wider Greater Manchester Oasis Navigator hospital-based programme for context and scope. In the absence of a ToC for the custody pilot, the project team designed a logic model and ToC to streamline the aims and outcomes for the GMNP. This allowed the project team to develop and adapt a suite of research tools needed to undertake the feasibility evaluation.

Methodological Approach

It was agreed that to conduct a robust feasibility evaluation a mixed methods approach was best suited to understand if and how GMNP achieved its short-, medium-, and longer-term outcomes (see appendix A). All research participants were provided with written (via a Participant Information Sheet) and verbal information about the research. Any participant aged over 16 was asked to provide written consent. The parent/carer of research participants under the age of 16 were provided with written information about the research in the form of a Participant Information Sheet. Prior to the fieldwork commencing, each participant was required to give their assent, and their parent/carer was required to sign a consent form. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. To ensure anonymity in this final report, all participants have been assigned a depersonalised identifier. All consent documents provided to children were written at an age-appropriate level.

Data Collection Methods

Custody Pilot Young People's Survey

The project team designed a young person's survey that investigated their experiences of the GM Navigators project and canvassed their views on how the project could be developed going forwards. Between the 6th March and the 11th April 2025, 17 young people completed an online survey

Custody Pilot Project Staff

We planned to involve three police officers housed within the Manchester Central Custody suite and briefed on the GMNP. Interview questions were designed to establish police officer's understanding of the pilot, their perceived outcomes and any perceived or real barriers and enablers. In total we interviewed two police officers.

Custody Pilot Stakeholder Interviews

The project team constructed a sampling framework to achieve a representative selection of participants. Sampling characteristics included organisation, role, and service area. In total we interviewed eight stakeholders ranging from GMP, Liaison and Diversion, GM Navigator staff, and commissioners.

Quantitative Data Analysis

GM Navigator's custody data analysis

Between the 1st July 2024 and the 26th June 2025, 104 young people were referred to the project. As shown in Figure 1 below, the vast majority of those referred were male (n=92, 88%) and the remaining 12 (12%) were female. The majority of the young people referred to the project were aged 14 to 17 (n=48, 47%) and 18 to 21 (n=35, 35%) (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 1. Gender of Referral (n=104)

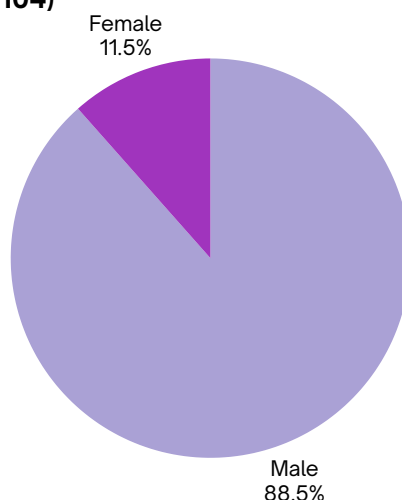
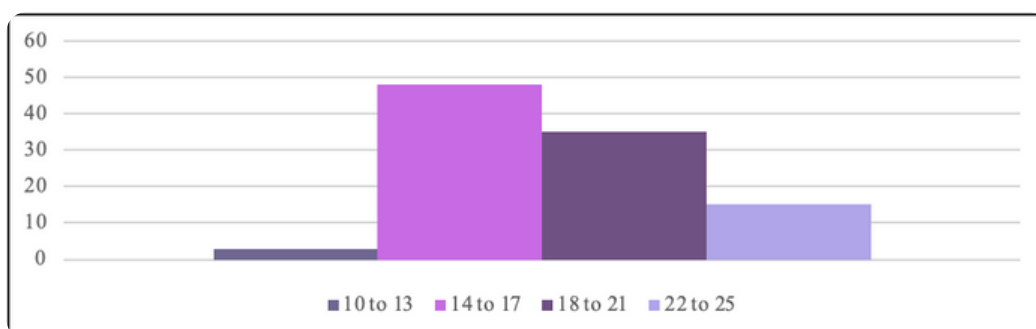
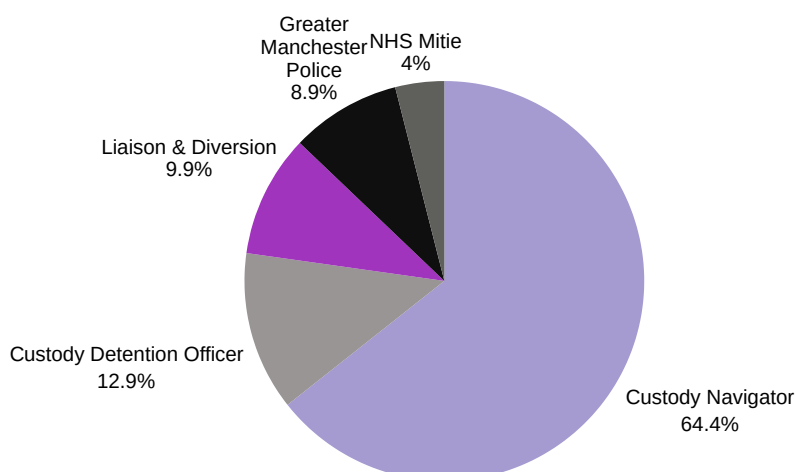


Figure 2. Age at Referral (n=104)



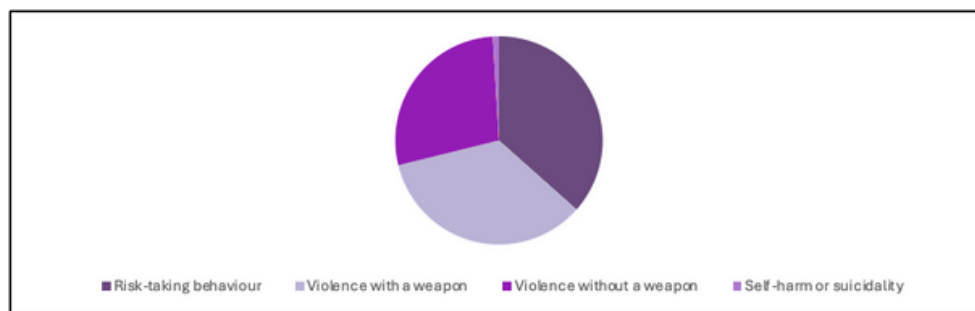
In terms of referral sources, two thirds (n=68, 65%) were from Custody Navigators. Other referral sources included Custody Detention Officers (n=13, 13%), Liaison & Diversion (n=10, 10%), Greater Manchester Police (n=9, 9%), and NHS-Mitie Care and Custody (n=4, 4%) (see Figure 3 below).

Figure 3. Referral Source (n=104)



As shown in the Figure 4 below, the reasons for referral included 'risk taking behaviour' (n=38, 37%), 'violence with a weapon' (n=36, 35%), and 'violence without a weapon' (n=29, 28%). One referral was for 'self-harm or suicidality'.

Figure 4. Reason for Referral (n=104)



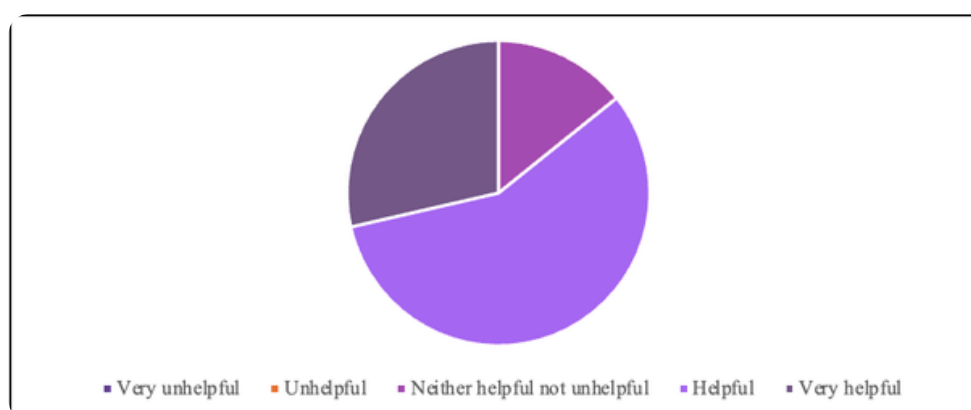
When it comes to the contact method following referral, just over two thirds (n=70, 67%) of the contacts were made in person by a Custody Navigator. The remaining contacts (n=34, 33%) were made electronically. The fact that two thirds of contacts were made in person aligns with the findings from the online survey where over three quarters of the respondents said they would have liked to have heard about the project 'in person' (n=7, 78%).

GM Navigator's online survey

Between the 6th March and the 11th April 2025, 17 young people completed an online survey that investigated their experiences of the GM Navigators project, and canvassed their views on how the project could be developed going forwards.

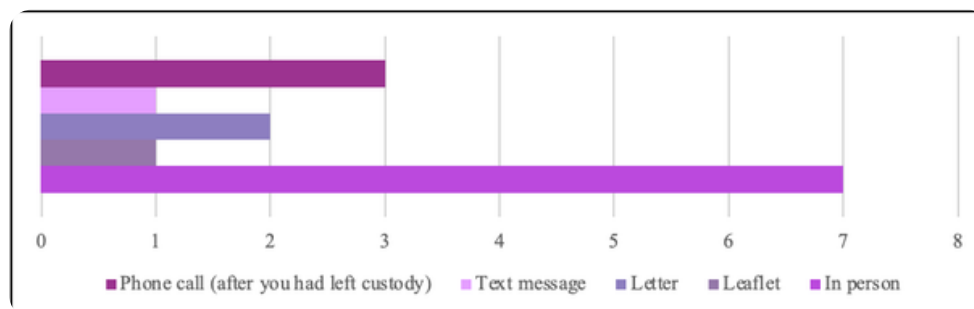
Just over half of the survey respondents (n=9, 53%) remembered being offered support from a Custody Navigator when they were at the Central Park Custody Suite. Of these, only four respondents (44%) understood how the service could support them. Yet, despite this, seven of the respondents (78%) took up the offer of support from a Custody Navigator. As shown in the Figure 5 below, over half of these seven young people (n=4, 57%) found the support 'helpful' and nearly three tenths (n=2, 29%) found it 'very helpful'.

Figure 5. How did you find the support?



All of the young people who remembered being offered the service (n=9, 100%), thought that the Custody Navigator service is a good thing to offer young people in custody. When asked how they would have liked to have heard about the project, as shown in Figure 6 below, over three quarters of the respondents said 'in person' (n=7, 78%), and a third (n=3, 33%) said by 'phone call' after they had left custody.

Figure 6: 'How would you have liked to have heard about the project?'



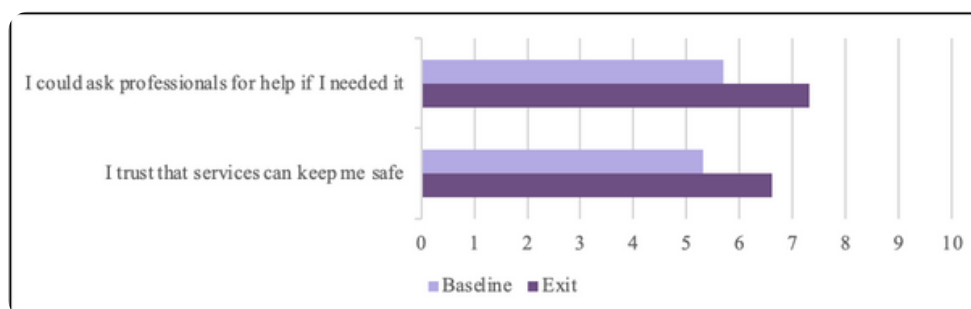
GM Navigators Baseline and Exit Questionnaire Analysis

The project collects outcome data via a Baseline and Exit Questionnaire. The questionnaire has four separate parts: part 1 has 10 statements that young people either agree or disagree with (using a 10-point Likert scale); part 2 looks at how often the young people have witnessed, or been personally involved in or directly experienced, violence in the last month; part 3 asks how many times in the last six months they have attended hospital/A&E; and part 4 uses the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) to ask seven questions around the young people's mental wellbeing. The questionnaire was administered at two points: when young people started with the project (baseline), and when they left the project (exit).

In part 1 of the questionnaire, there are two statements that are particularly relevant to the impact of the work of the Navigators: 'I could ask professionals for help if I needed it (e.g. teachers, social workers, youth workers)' and 'I trust that services can keep me safe'. As noted above, young people are asked 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements' on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is completely disagree and 10 is completely agree.

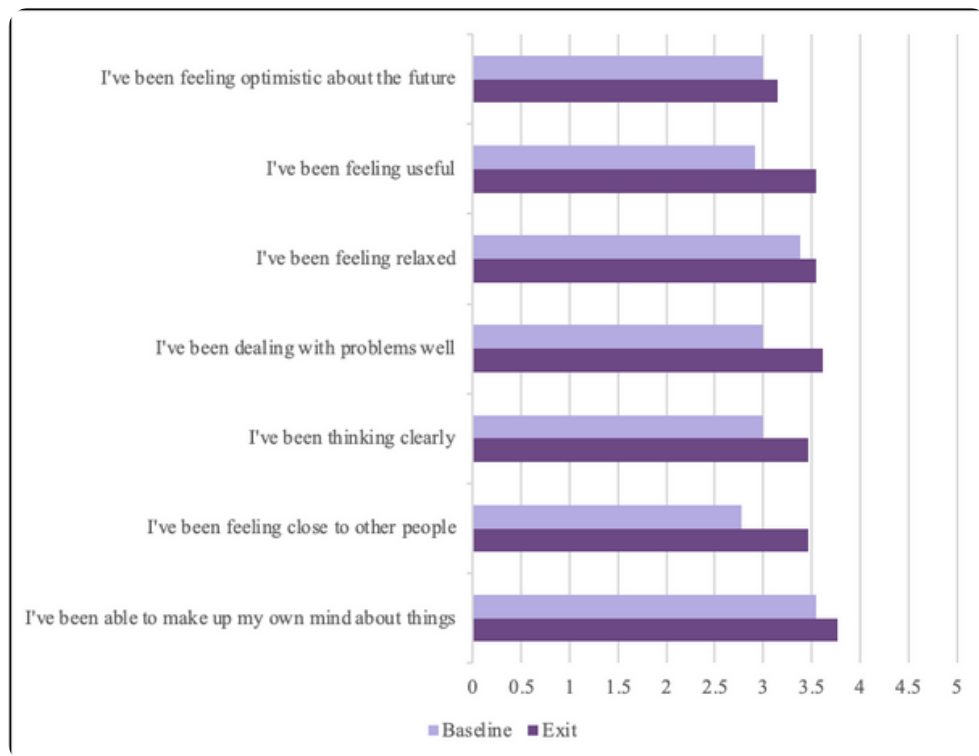
As shown in Figure 7 below, analysis of the baseline and exit scores for these two statements showed an 'improvement' (i.e. young people were more likely to agree with the statement) after being involved with the project.

Figure 7. Average baseline and exit scores (n=13)



Part 4 of the questionnaire uses the SWEMWBS to investigate the impact of the project on young people's mental wellbeing. The SWEMWBS contains seven statements about feelings and thoughts (see Figure 8 below for the statements). Young people are asked to choose the answer that best describes their experiences over the preceding two weeks, with answers including 'None of the time' = 1, 'Rarely' = 2, 'Some of the time' = 3, 'Often' = 4, and 'All of the time' = 5. As can be seen in Figure 8, the average scores at exit were all 'improved' at exit (i.e. the young people agreed with the statements more often). Indeed, the average scores for all seven statements were greater than 3 at exit.

Figure 8. Average baseline and exit scores on the SWEMWBS (n=13)



Qualitative Findings

The evaluation team analysed the findings from the interviews with professionals including GM Navigators staff, commissioners, those in Liaison and Diversion, and GMP (n=8), as well as young people (n=2) and family members (n=2). The team categorised the results into themes using NVivo qualitative software. The themes are presented below with quotes from the interviewees to explain the findings.

The stressful and unpredictable context of police custody

All research participants understood the impact of police custody on young people, including the impact on young people's families. Police custody was described by all participants as stressful, unpredictable, and challenging in ensuring children's rights. Referring young people to support in a timely manner, supporting Navigators and Police to work together, and for Navigators to optimize their time with young people and build trusting relationships. In particular, professionals discussed the impact on young people's mental health as a result of being detained in police custody overnight. GM Navigators outlined how difficult it was to engage young people when they had received a referral overnight as opposed to point of arrest and immediate detainment in the custody suite.

'You can go and see someone in the morning, a child or a young person when we've had a referral overnight, and the lack of engagement compared to what you would get when they first come into custody, is completely different' (Custody Navigator)

One parent further elaborated on this point, explaining that for young people and families the stress of custody can be compounded due to poor past experiences with the police. This prior experience according to families of the young people arrested can result in a lack of trust regarding the police's recommendation for help or support:

"Then the police pushed and pushed and twisted and twisted and threatened my granddaughter [...] this is going to go to court, you'll get a custodial sentence. I went mad when I found out that she'd accepted the caution. I said no. So, I think the case of the police wanting to change their minds and the police wanting to get whatever tick or whatever statistic they're supposed to get and make people believe that these things don't matter, it's only a bit of a caution, it's only this, it's only that but it's something and it's something on your record. [...] from where we stood, we just felt we could not trust the police to say what they were going to do and/or that they were just after a result and a statistic." (Grandparent)

Some professionals reiterated that GMP are inconsistent in their approach and attitude towards young people in custody. Staff claimed that discrimination based on race, gender and age was evident from GMP, and that this created further distrust and fear of the police from young people.

'I've been racially profiled. How would a young person feel who's already overwhelmed? Even people who come in to give statements and stuff. That can be so anxiety inducing, and stressful and scary, but then to be treated like shit...' (Professional)

GMP staff also concurred that some officers could harbour mistrust:

“We have a natural suspicion of [...] strangers in the police station; we are, as a breed, we are naturally suspicious.” (GMP professional)

“Cops are very process driven and are very black and white in their approach, generally. Obviously, there are shades of grey in there, but I find that the whole custody thing is a process. It is time bound because of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, so PACE says you’ve got to do this and that.” (GMP professional)

Police also emphasised the pressures on individual officers, claiming that these pressures can lead some officers to be cantankerous, [because] they've got so much demand on them. You've got to bear in mind that detainee numbers have gone up - doubled - in three years. We've gone up from 30,000 to around 65,000 (detainees). Staffing has not gone up.”

However, families, GM Navigators, and police also noted that some officers react differently to the stresses of the role:

“Some of them are amazing’ in the help they offer and their approach to children and families, ‘but some of them are just disgraceful.” (Grandparent)

The stressful and unpredictable nature of police custody and its impact on the experiences, support and outcomes for children in custody, along with the long-term challenges faced by children and families was the main reason all groups understood the importance of the Navigators in custody suites.

The need for independent advice, support and advocacy in custody

Having GM Navigators in custody supports the myriads of issues the children face. Firstly, having someone with a youth work perspective reduces the stress of custody and provides a safe person

“I also like to make it clear [to young people] that I don't actually work for the police. That's one of the first things that I tell these young people because instantly I know that will break down that barrier.” (Custody Navigator)

“[engaging with us] allows them some time out of the cell as well where they're actually talking to somebody and it's not connected for the offense that they're arrested for. It gives them that bit of a mind break and gets them thinking as opposed to just sitting in the cell or just sleeping and not really engaging.” (Custody Navigator)

Secondly, the Navigators provide a trusted independent source of advice and advocacy for the child and their family in the unfamiliar and stressful context of custody:

“It was just a relief to know you had an independent person there to guide you through’ (Parent)

The above quote from a parent of young person arrested was supported by the GM Navigator:

“That's one of the biggest parts of my role... advocacy in general. I've had times in that suite where someone's told me a safeguarding concern, and I've gone and fed that back”
(Custody Navigator)

One parent/carer emphasized the difference between their first and second experience in custody when the police officer working with them introduced them to GM Navigators:

“The police sergeant was completely different. I said, “Look, I’m not very au fait with everything that goes on with the police. We’re not a police involved family, never have been.” I’ve always thought that everything had a system, and the system was fair but that’s not been our experience. I’m very, very wary and very upset, very concerned, very upset about the whole situation. So, we don’t want to go down this line again. Now that police sergeant was the one who [...] said, “Well look, would it help you if we got somebody that’s completely independent from the police to take you to one side and talk with you and help you?” I said, “Yes, it would.” That’s how we got introduced. It was the police sergeant who took the time and was considerate enough to pull the chap in from Oasis Navigators.” (Parent)

Professionals also understood how the Navigators presence can support information dissemination to support services, helping them to prioritize and direct support to children across custody suites, and to be there in lieu of other services if children do not meet the threshold imminently:

“I make the referrals from Central, but I think the difficulty we’ve got is from other custodies as well. Obviously, we can become quite inundated in terms of referrals as well and they rely on us quite heavily for mental health support. Obviously, then we have to triage our referrals and see what takes priority. So, I’m not saying young people don’t take priority. They do, within our catchment, but when we triage referrals and we’ve got someone who’s potentially acutely unwell, we then have to approach that situation first and, by that point, by the time we’ve dealt with that, that child or young person might have left custody and we’ve not had time to screen them. So, this is what I’m saying, in terms of Navigators on site, they would be able to go and triage, do that, see that young person, whilst we’re also focussed in on the other one.” (Professional)

Long- Term Benefits of GM Navigators Outside of Police Custody

The main benefits reported by young people and families was the long-term support the GM Navigators offered:

“Even though custody might not be that reachable teachable moment in itself and there’s a lot of restrictions in custody itself- it’s actually a good point to start from to then begin offering a lot more diverse or a bigger range of services that can be offered at different times to young people and their families through different professionals as well who may not also be able to work in custody.” (Professional)

This view was also supported by the Custody Navigators themselves:

“We see a lot of young people coming in with violence and weapons and becoming involved in CSE, gang related incidents. So, for me, the strengths are providing that sort of support and that educational support around that.” (Custody Navigator)

“There was a young person that wanted to join the Army, but he was concerned that because of his convictions and his association to criminality, he wouldn’t get in. So again, the Navigators guided him through the process and helped him, and he’s got into the Army programme basically, which is good.” (Police)

GMP further discussed the benefits that they felt the GM Navigators offered in terms of diversion from custody and the cost benefit analysis of the scheme:

“You're stopping them coming in. It's putting police back on the street. It's stopping children, most importantly, coming back in and being traumatised by this. It's protecting victims. It's the cost to society of putting people through courts. I think the statistics, and I'm probably out of date on this, but if a child comes into custody and they start coming in repeatedly, it works out about half a million quid between the age of 18 and 25 normally, to go through the court system. The money that could be saved on is massive.” (Police)

Parents, professionals and commissioners emphasised the need for trusted adults in the lives of young people and families, and the Navigators described themselves as individuals who could be trusted adults in young people's lives:

“His mom literally told me he never trusted professionals. Even just that word of trust is massive. This young lad never trusted, and he'd had professionals in his life from basically birth. He'd never trusted them until he met me. That's just amazing to hear” (Custody Navigator)

“We've had their parents coming in as well. And again, it stimulates their parents' interest in the scheme as well because some parents will be at the end of their tether with their children.” (Custody Navigator)

Children also shared their experience of the GM Navigators. It was important to capture young people's voices within the evaluation and the case study below encapsulates many of the long-term benefits felt by the GM Navigators project.

Case Study: Tom

Tom was initially arrested for fighting at college, followed by a further arrest for carrying a knife in a public place. The project team spoke to Tom about the support he and his family received from the GM Navigators project:

Tom: Because people normally don't listen to what I'm saying or what I actually want. They just... they give me a load of questions but never... I don't know what I want you see so I need someone to try and help me guide me or tell me opportunities and he's [GM Navigator] done that for me. And he's been there, you know, on the court date. He's never been late. He's always there. He knows about my case. He's actually, you know, there for me basically. So, I do like him a lot man. And normally I don't really open up to people you see because I don't know I'm a bit of a shy guy you see. But no, I've been talking to [...], and it seems like he really wants to help me.

Interviewer: Ah, that's good. So, he's like a genuine person who is listening to you.

Tom: Exactly. He's been with me throughout the whole court, through when I went to the cells, which has been a few weeks now you see. So, he's actually stood by me and listened to my points and what I'm finding difficult and what I'm finding a bit hard to do. Because I always do push stuff backwards, but with him he's making me want to do it you see. He's making me try and push and do better than what I've been doing.

Interviewer: Yes. So, it's because he's like a consistent person?

Tom: Yes.

Interviewer: And you're finding that's motivating you.

Tom: He's honest as well. You know, he won't lie to me. He will say what he could do and what is a bit difficult to do but he'll try. You know, it's the best I could ask for just to try. Obviously, even when I didn't get arrested, obviously, it's always been on my mind. I never had a connection, like anyone to talk to. Like if I didn't go cells I would never even know about him, or [GM Navigators]. So, the cells did make me want to do it more, but I was already thinking about it before, but I just didn't have no connection or no way of speaking to [GM Navigators] you see until I got arrested.

Challenges in implementation and effectiveness of the pilot

The main challenge reiterated by professionals working in custody suites was that the Navigators could not be there as often as they would like them to. The change in mindset when young people have been processed as opposed to when they first enter custody is a barrier to engagement due to the reasons outlined above. Navigators considered how they were relatable to young people, and also able to engage effectively with them. However, it is concerning that there may be issues with hiring those with lived experience of custody in custodial environments as reported below by a member of GMP:

“Lived experience is really important and somebody who's been in prison, somebody who was actually there would be very, very useful coming into custody suites. I've been in prison mate, I can tell you, you don't want to go there. And it's so much more impactful than somebody who's been a social worker [...] Yet it's going to be hard work getting around the vetting to come in here (Police)

Other practical challenges regarding police relationships with GM Navigators and police's role in supporting the Navigator's work is that police staff are not consistent in the custody suite, therefore the turnover of staff can be high. This means that there are inconsistencies in how supportive some police staff are and how others do not have time or do not know what to do to make a referral. This inconsistency is evidenced below:

“Some officers just come and go, don't they? For whatever they're doing. Some of them are really inquisitive and some of them are really helpful, and some of them will take me around the cells while they're waiting for something to be signed off, and they'll ask me about the project, and I'll give them the referral.” (Custody Navigator)

The importance of the form being completed and accurately, is crucial to enable the Navigators to continue to offer support to young people:

“Sometimes it's hard to get contact numbers because their phones have been taken from them. So, data capture as well. I did get one referral a few months ago, and it just had an email address, no contact number, no actual postal address. And in the notes, it just said, the young person's name needs help. So, what was the point in even doing that form? Obviously, I emailed the email address that we had a number of times, but I didn't hear back. That was a lost chance in my opinion.” (Custody Navigator)

Another one of the Professionals brought up the issue of police discrimination and the effect this could have on the young people and the pilot itself:

The police staff also highlighted the suspicious nature of the force itself as well as their fatigue with change and constant initiatives on top of an increasing workload:

“We're always trying new things in the police and some of the staff feel, right, this is another new thing that we're going to try. And I think there is that bit of scepticism because it's something new, but as it got through and as we've seen that some of these people are not coming into custody, staff have come onboard going, well actually, it [the pilot] is a good thing.” (Police)

“I think within the police and the wider public sector, because there's been so many changes over the last ten years, we've had the financial crisis, we've had COVID, we've had changes of government as well coming out of the EU. There's been so much that's been going on that's brought about so much change. Some of the staff can feel a bit fatigued of change.” (Police)

Other challenges identified was trying to understand where the Navigators can be most effectively deployed alongside Liaison and Diversion services, partly due to ‘custody data [being] notoriously bad’.

“One of the challenges also is that there's Liaison and Diversion who work from custody. You want the right professional for that child or young person. You don't want to see a stream of well-meaning professionals. It's got to be about the connection. Something that I do think we need to look at is there's a lot of need; there's a lot of young people who need things. We can collaborate; we don't have to compete with people like L&D but what is their specialism.” (Professional)

The custody data was highlighted as needing to support the wider understanding of how Navigators work within Liaison and Diversion services, and to understand why young people are or are not engaging with Navigators in the first place. More comprehensive data would better help understand the differing roles of professionals in custody and how they can support each other, rather than competing for or duplicating work:

“I think there's further work that we need to do is look at who is where. What are we asking of GMP?” (Professional)

“There needs to be a smarter use of some existing resources alongside not just looking at this in its purity. And ultimately, you know what's going to end up being best for the young people and the support that they need at those different points because all of those resources are there.” (Professional)

It was also felt by professionals working within the wider service that a better understanding was needed on how the Navigators can work within wider Youth Justice services (e.g. in court)

“How [GM Navigators] links to things like youth justice and what I would hate, and I spend half my life saying this and trying to do it is how do we link everything together, so A knows what B's doing. At the moment there's a lot of well-intended stuff going on but is it adding value and is it in conflict or is it just layering up?” (Professional)

This was echoed by other professionals who stated that better alignment with other Youth Justice services would increase help and support:

“Align them more with the other service providers, Liaison and Diversion and NHS Mitie, because it may be that they're the right person for some, but they're not for others. And that there's other pathways that they could go down, which would free them up and their money for the ones that are more susceptible to or more applicable to what they do.” (Professional)

Key Findings: Summary

A major implementation challenge was that Navigators were not consistently present in custody suites, particularly at the critical early point of arrest. This limited their ability to engage young people when they were most receptive. Lived experience was seen as vital to building trust with young people. However, police vetting procedures created barriers to employing individuals with custodial histories—undermining one of the Navigator key strengths. High turnover of custody staff led to inconsistent understanding and support for the Navigator role. While some officers were supportive, others lacked time or awareness, resulting in incomplete or poor-quality referrals. Incomplete referral forms, lack of contact information, and delays in referrals hindered follow-up and engagement with young people. These gaps represented missed opportunities for intervention. Professionals, particularly those from racialised communities, reported experiences of racial profiling and challenges to their legitimacy in custody suites—undermining their sense of safety and professional credibility. Some police staff expressed scepticism about the pilot, attributing this to change fatigue from years of public sector reform. However, buy-in increased as positive outcomes became evident.

Inadequate custody data limited understanding of Navigator impact and prevented strategic planning. There were also concerns about role duplication with Liaison and Diversion (L&D) services, with calls for greater clarity, coordination, and alignment. Despite these challenges, the youth work ethos underpinning the Navigator model—rooted in relationship-building and advocacy—was widely praised by professionals and seen as offering unique value to young people and their families. There was strong consensus that Navigators should be embedded more widely across youth justice, including courts and healthcare settings, to provide continuity and reduce fragmentation in service delivery.

Overall, participants concurred that the significant value of the GM Navigators lies in the youth-work approach used to develop trusted relationships with young people and their families. Especially those families who have experienced stress, trauma, and injustice (potentially in custody itself). Due to possible previous experiences of young people and families in the custody suite environment, having the Navigators there as an independent source of advocacy and advice was crucial. As such, the Navigators have demonstrated their potential as a long-term signposting service for young people and families. This service therefore can contribute to and support the streamlining of wider Liaison and Diversion services.

To enable this support requires a better understanding of the referrals process (of young people to the Navigators service), and the longer-term streamlining and evaluation of the referral process. Without this streamlining and improvement of the referral process, the support the Navigators can offer young people, and their families is limited. Nonetheless, the parameters which the GM Navigators currently work within is adequate enough to demonstrate meaningful change for some young people and their families as evidenced within this report.

Recommendations

The recommendations fall into two categories – strategic and operational. The operational recommendations focus on improving the effectiveness of Navigators in custody suites, whilst the strategic recommendations provide an understanding of how GM Navigators can work alongside wider services to tailor support for young people at various stages of their time in contact with the youth justice system.

Operational Recommendations

Look at an on-call system so Navigators can work across more custody suites

To enable Navigators to engage with more children in custody across GM and target their response at specific times. This would enable police to refer children when they first enter custody allowing the Navigators arriving to build the relationship in that crucial timeframe.

Give Navigators more time in custody suites to build relationships with custody staff

To further support children, GM Navigators would benefit from more time in custody. The Navigators can also support information dissemination and referrals to other support services for children in custody, enhancing other services in prioritising the needs of children across custody suites. Having Navigators situated in custody suites for longer may also support police to become more familiar with the referral process (and the role of Navigators themselves).

Strategic Recommendations

Explore ways to navigate the vetting process to ensure people with lived experience can work with young people in custodial environments

Participants saw the lived experience element as crucial to the Navigators work and their ability to build trust and rapport with young people.

Look at how to best deploy Navigators in the wider spectrum of custody support and Liaison and Diversion services

In response to feedback from young people and Custody staff regarding benefits of having Navigator support at the time of arrest, Navigators have adjusted to provide more time on site to enable engagement at peak periods of need. This responsive model has also enabled Navigators to attend other Custody Suites to make contact with named individuals arrested for serious offences.

Operational Recommendations

A designated room with privacy for Navigators to speak to young people

To build trusted relationships with children and young people, it is imperative that Navigators are independent from the police/ other services. The Navigators recommended that a designated private room should be available in custody suites when they engage with young people. This will help young people to feel safe and to confide crucial information to the Navigators regarding the support they need going forward.

Access to IOPS for Navigators

This would enable Navigators to access crucial information regarding offences, support, and staff deployment around children in custody and direct their time accordingly.



Strategic Recommendations

Find a way to improve data collection in police custody to better understand how to improve the work of the Navigators

Stakeholders emphasised the need to understand why the GM Navigators offer is (or is not) taken up by those in custody, how they are referred and when, to inform the future direction of the service.

Assess the potential for Navigators to be embedded at different stages of children's journey through the justice system beyond police custody

Professionals highlighted the potential of GM Navigators in court settings as well as custody and healthcare settings. This diversity of the offer could potentially provide consistent direction and support throughout complex youth justice systems and processes for young people and their families.

Invest in longevity

Investment is needed for longevity with specific timelines so that interventions and the work of police, Liaison and Diversion alongside the Navigators can be planned strategically. This investment would also enable further consideration of how the Navigators could be deployed to work across other custody suites rather than just Central.

References

- Armitage, H, Heyes, K, O’Leary, C, Tarrega, M and Taylor-Collins, E (2020) What Makes for Effective Youth Mentoring Programmes: A rapid evidence summary. Research Report. Nesta
- Brice, J. M., & Boyle, A. A. (2020) Are ED-based violence intervention programmes effective in reducing revictimisation and perpetration in victims of violence? A systematic review. *Emergency medicine journal*, 37(8), 489-495.
- College of Policing (2024) Custody Navigators for young people <https://www.college.police.uk/support-forces/practices/custody-navigators-young-people>
- Dickson, A., Blackburn, L., Duffy M., Naumann, DN., and Brooks, A. (2023) ‘Engagement with a youth violence intervention programme is associated with lower re-attendance after violent injury: A UK major trauma network observational study’. *PLoS ONE* 18(10): e0292836. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0292836>
- Ellison, M. Nandwani, K, Bannister, J, & Hall, B. (2024) Greater Manchester Violence Reduction Unit Hospital Navigator Pilot - Implementation Evaluation.
- Fine M., Freudenberg N., Payne Y., et al. (2003). ‘Anything can happen with police around. Urban youth evaluate strategies of surveillance in public places’. *Journal of Social Issues*, 59, 141–158.
- Glasgow RE, Stevens VJ, Vogt TM, Mullooly JP, et al.(1991) Changes in smoking associated with hospitalization: Quit rates, predictive variables, and intervention implications. *Am J Health Promotion*. 1991;6:24–29. doi: 10.4278/0890-1171-6.1.24
- HMIP (2024) Research and analysis: Multi-agency responses to serious youth violence: working together to support and protect children. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-agency-responses-to-serious-youth-violence-working-together-to-support-and-protect-children/multi-agency-responses-to-serious-youth-violence-working-together-to-support-and-protect-children>
- His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (2023) Young people’s experiences of serious youth violence: Care not criminalisation <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/publication-html/young-peoples-experiences-of-serious-youth-violence/>
- Howard League for Penal Reform (2024) Young people and the police: Can the police and crime commissioners lead the way for change? <https://howardleague.org/publications/on-our-side/>
- Keeling P. (2017). No respect: Young BAME men, the police and stop and search. Criminal Justice Alliance.
- Lawson P.J. and Flocke S.A. (2009) Teachable moments for health behavior change: a concept analysis. *Patient education and counseling*. 76(1): p. 25–30. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2008.11.002> PMID: 19110395
- Marshall, M. & Waring, G. (2021): “They Make Heavy Stuff Lighter.” Youth Workers in the Hospital Setting: A Service Evaluation, *Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Nursing*, DOI: 10.1080/24694193.2021.1951892

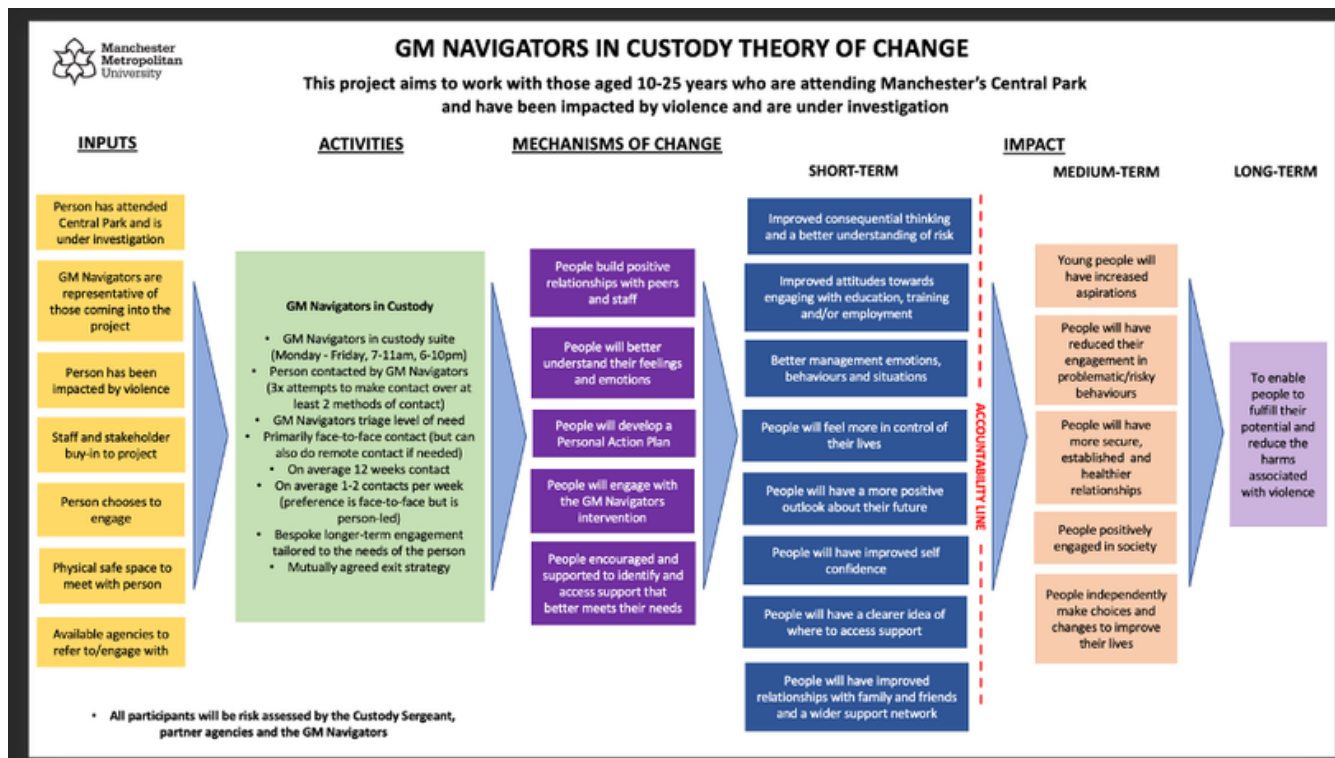
References

- O'Dwyer, K. (2019). Reducing youth crime: The role of mentoring. Irish Probation Journal. [Your paragraph text Vol%2016%20CL%20Full%20Version.pdf#page=155](#)
- Quigley, M., Martynowicz, A., & Gardner, C. (2015). 'Building bridges: An independent evaluation of Le Chéile's restorative justice project. Research findings.' Irish Probation Journal, 12.
- Raposa, E. B., Rhodes, J., Stams, G. J. J. M., Card, N., Burton, S., Schwartz, S., Sykes, L. A. Y., Kanchewa, S., Kupersmidt, J., & Hussain, S. (2019). The Effects of Youth Mentoring Programs: A Meta-analysis of Outcome Studies. Journal of youth and adolescence, 48(3), 423–443. [Your paragraph text](#)
- Skarlatidou, A., Ludwig, L., Solymosi, R., & Bradford, B. (2023). Understanding Knife Crime and Trust in Police with Young People in East London. Crime & Delinquency, 69(5), 943–970.
- Tolan, P., Henry, D., Schoeny, M., Bass, A., Lovegrove, P. and Nichols, E. (2013), Mentoring Interventions to Affect Juvenile Delinquency and Associated Problems: A Systematic Review. Campbell Systematic Reviews, 9: 1-158.
- Winickoff J, Hillis V, Palfrey J, Perrin J, Rigotti N. (2003) 'A smoking cessation intervention for parents of children who are hospitalized for respiratory illness: the stop tobacco outreach program'. Pediatrics. 111:140–145. doi: 10.1542/peds.111.1.140
- Wong ,K., Roberts, A., Bailey, G., Kinsella, R. and Gray, P. (2023) The DIVERT Programme, Feasibility and pilot study report. Youth Endowment Foundation: London. [Your paragraph text](#)

Appendices

Appendix A

GM Navigators Theory of Change



Appendix B

GM Navigators Online Survey

When you were at the Central Park Custody Suite do you remember being offered support from a Custody Navigator? Yes/No

If No, go to end of survey

If Yes:

Did you understand how this service could support you? (Y/N)

Did you take up the offer of support? (Y/N)

•Yes

§ How did you find the support? (scale from 1-5 not at all useful to very useful)

§ What would make it better? (free text)

•No (tick all that apply)

§ Didn't understand what it was

§ Didn't trust it

§ Felt like I had to say yes, but didn't really want it

§ Didn't need it

§ Something else (free text)

Is there anything that would have made you more likely to say yes to support? (free text)

Do you think the Navigator service is a good thing to offer young people in custody? Yes/No

How would you have liked to have heard about the project? (tick all that apply)

•In person

•Leaflet

•Letter

•Text message

•Phone call (after you had left custody)

2. In the last month, how often have you ...
(Please put a circle around your answer.)

...Witnessed any form of violence (this could be in person or in videos/on social media etc)	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
---	-------	-----------	--------	-------

...Been personally involved in or experienced violence yourself	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
---	-------	-----------	--------	-------

3. How many times in the last 6 months have you attended hospital/A&E due to violence?

4. Below are some statements about feelings and thoughts. Please put a circle around the answer that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks.

Statements	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the Future	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling useful	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling relaxed	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5

I've been dealing with problems well

I've been thinking clearly	1	2	3	4	5
----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---

I've been feeling close to other people

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

I've been able to make up my own mind about things	1	2	3	4	5
--	---	---	---	---	---

Notes & Comments?