

Greater Manchester Children and Young Peoples Engagement Project.

1). Introduction and Project Outline.

The Greater Manchester Children and Young People's Engagement Project addresses the needs of some of our most marginalized populations who experience significant health inequalities. The project was designed to support the Integrated Health and Justice Strategy for Greater Manchester by engaging and consulting with specific marginalized groups to understand how we can build on the strengths of, and improve, services and support for children, young people and those transitioning to adulthood who are a part of or are at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system and or violence.

The project focuses on two main elements of the strategy to support the work and priorities of the Violence Reduction Unit and the Health & Justice Learning Disability and/or Autism Steering group. To achieve this project, activities concentrated on supporting the review of the Mentally Vulnerable Offenders Panels, and undertook research relating to the BAME community, people with learning disabilities and/or autism and the experiences of and contact with the criminal justice system.

To achieve the project aims, we targeted engagement and consultation with marginalized populations including children and young people up to the age of 26 with learning disabilities, autism, learning difficulties or communication disorders and with members of the BAME community¹. The project also engaged with relevant agencies and organisations.

2). Key Summary Points (Main themes and outcomes).

The data analysis generated considerable consistency in terms of the identification of themes across participants. The same key issues were

¹ (It is recognized by Pathways that the term BAME is not welcomed by many members of the community and during the project we have sought to identify a term with community members that may be more acceptable).

repeatedly highlighted across the duration of the project. These are outlined below.

- A lack of understanding and trust between marginalized communities, statutory authorities, and the police.
- Insufficient training regarding and/or experience of children and young people with learning disabilities and/or autism across several key agencies and statutory bodies. This includes both a lack of understanding in general terms regarding learning disability and autism, but it is especially the case in relation to the workings of and exposure to the criminal justice system (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection 2021).
- Issues of 'trust' across the system at all levels; from one-to-one interactions, within and across statutory and professional agencies and the wider criminal justice system.
- Lack of flexibility of approaches, interventions, systems, and individualized responses.
- Over-dependence on the 'right' professionals (police, teachers, healthcare professionals, statutory agency workers etc) meeting those who need support or help. This can work well if the 'right' professionals (those with appropriate experience, knowledge, empathy, understanding etc) are involved but, at a system level, this is too variable and inconsistent.
- Too few opportunities for early and 'lower' level interventions before situations become more serious or enter crisis mode. This might include greater opportunities for young people to have access to social activities, opportunities to work with appropriate role models, opportunities to be involved in community projects and activities, opportunities to talk about their lives and issues they face and to build positive relationships with peers and other community members.
- Delay in obtaining a diagnosis and access to appropriate support. In addition, members of the criminal justice system (for example magistrates) can rely too much on the formal diagnoses and not recognise the needs of those experiencing mental health issues, learning disabilities or autism.

3). Project Overview, Background and Context.

The project aimed to increase the breadth, engagement and understanding of health and criminal justice agencies of marginalized groups of children and young people and to facilitate sustainable engagement and the improvement of services. These groups included children and young adults aged 16-26 with learning disabilities, learning difficulties, autism, communication difficulties and members of the BAME community. This has been done in order to:

- listen to unrepresented opinions, views, and attitudes
- develop greater insight and understanding about unmet needs and the potential vulnerability of people with Learning Disabilities, Autistic people and people with Mental Health issues being coerced and persuaded into criminal activity by people believed to be friends (including hate and mate crime)
- Assist in shaping the way services are delivered and ultimately influence future spending and activity.

3.1). The Impact of COVID-19.

This project - like everything else in the last 18 months - has been adversely impacted by COVID-19 and the various effects this has had on everyone. Clearly, it has affected the way we have gathered information (for example, conducting interviews and listening activities remotely) and on who we could reach. Although everyone and every organisation we contacted expressed interest and willingness to be involved the added time pressures and demands of working during COVID-19 (and the restrictions in place) led to some simply being unable to find time, space or capacity to respond to our requests for interviews or other meetings.

We feel this is especially important to emphasise given the organisations involved - who are often under significant workload and other pressures even without the added complications of COVID-19 - and the time-critical aspects of much of the work of the organisations we were working with (who clearly must prioritise the individuals and groups they work with) and the increased demands placed upon everyone during these unprecedented times.

It has also become clear that COVID-19 has added to not only people's work pressures and caseloads but has impacted on those seeking support, experiencing mental-health issues or with learning disabilities and autism. This has been seen in increased family stress and conflict (during times of enforced

confinement), the impact on financial and other resources, the restrictions on wider social networks and social activities and increased stress and anxiety individuals have experienced during this time.

Many individuals have had to engage with a range of new experiences and constraints as well as a whole set of 'unknowns' that cannot be planned for or even foreseen. These have been exceptionally unsettling times for everyone and have created new, extra and increased demands on all of us. All of this has should be borne in mind when reading this report.

3.2). How we would like this report to be read.

We have designed and completed this report to be accessible while retaining research rigour and coherence. We would like the report to be read in ways that reflect the commitment and concerns of all participants and stakeholders that is consistent with their desire to see meaningful action and change. The report aims to support that action and change by reporting on the key issues and concerns that were reported to the research team by participants throughout the project. The report does not seek to criticise or problematise the work of any organisation or specific approaches - rather it seeks to provide helpful, constructive and informed reflections and observations that can help inform and support future change.

4). Methods - Who we spoke with and listened to. How and why, we spoke with and listened to these people and groups.

This project was designed to connect with young people and groups who have direct experience of the issues facing children and young people in the Greater Manchester area This might be someone who has had contact with the criminal justice system in any way or is at risk of becoming involved with the criminal justice system. This includes those who may be both victims of and/or perpetrators of crime. They may have been a victim of crime or are potentially vulnerable to crime or they may be involved with services or intervention providers. The project also engaged with agencies whose primary focus is to manage, control or respond to crime and disorder and are responsible for reducing crime, violence, anti-social behaviour, offending and re-offending as well as safeguarding children, vulnerable adults, and the public.

The project builds directly on the skills, experience, expertise and networks of Pathways Associates. It employed methods they have used over the years to engage with diverse participants in different ways to find out about their

experiences, views, concerns, and thoughts about how things can be improved. Many of those involved are from what are often termed 'seldom heard' groups - that is people whose views and experiences (for whatever reason) are ignored. Pathways Associates and the staff involved have considerable experience and effectiveness in reaching these groups and engaging with them in ways that help people to feel comfortable and safe. This enables the team to access important insights and knowledge that are not always readily accessed by more formal and structured research.

To effectively engage with participants and capture their views and experiences (as well as reach as many people as possible in a relatively short time with limited resources) the project team adopted a five-fold approach. This involved:

- 1). Interviews with children and young people on a one-to-one basis (usually remotely due to COVID-19 requirements).
- 2). Discussions with professionals from key organisations providing services and/or interventions.
- 3). A brief online (Survey Monkey) questionnaire (see appendix ii).
- 4). Listening to group and collective discussions at formal meetings of key bodies in the Greater Manchester area This included the Greater Manchester Autism Consortium (GMAC), Regional Care and Treatment Review (CTR) and Care, Education and Treatment Review (CETR) groups, Greater Manchester Police (GMP), The Regional Being Safe Group, Third Sector Organisations and the Violence Reduction Unit.
- 5). Review and analysis of policy documents and secondary analysis (see section 10).

This approach has generated significant and important insights that will be reported below. However, an important point to note here is that although specific people and groups had designated roles or responsibilities, the experiences, expertise, and views often overlapped and went beyond their designated remit or occupational role. Participants had wider views and were able to draw on these and make important connections. This is a collective strength of those who took part in the project and is of considerable potential value when taking this work further in the field.

The robust and valid findings of this project provide important insights for all those involved in working with children and young people across Greater

Manchester, offering direct and rich insight into the experiences and views of the young people and groups at the centre of these processes.

5). Detailed reporting of what was said and discussed.

5.1. What is Working

Overall Positive Points

- There is clear evidence of thoughtful, experienced, committed and concerned professionals who have a great deal to offer in terms of insight and expertise.
- There is evidence of professionals from different organisations and communities engaging with and listening to each other in positive ways.
- The data collected demonstrates frank and open reflections and comments about what is and is not working from inside key agencies.
- There is a clear desire and willingness across the agencies and professionals we spoke with and listened to see effective change that really benefits and helps people.

More Specific Areas of What is Working.

- Taking a holistic approach with young people and their families/carers, that is thinking about the person in terms of their wider life and taking into consideration the health and mental well-being of the whole family/carers and young people, is a positive and effective approach.
- More coordinated work with schools can lead to a reduction in the number of exclusions and young people feeling 'given up on'.
- The development of clear and effective diversion plans and activities for young people who are engaged with Mentally Vulnerable Offender Panels.
- The GMMB SpringBoard Project, for children that have been permanently excluded from school, has benefitted children and young people with limited interest in academic studies who are 'underperforming' against current National Curriculum standards. This approach offers more practical opportunities for children and young people to engage in activities they may be more interested in or suited to (for example, mechanics, building work, joinery).

- Developing employment schemes for children and young people which focus on vocational work helping access the workplace.
- The existence of a ten-point criteria scheme used within criminal justice system to deal with young people in or who have been in care.
- The Probation Service report that having young adult concentrators who just focus on young adults is working well especially in Manchester, Salford and Trafford. Although COVID-19 has reduced the number of teams that can provide a true concentrator model (as there has been a focus on emergency delivery and remote models concentrating contact on the most complex and risky cases) this approach has worked well.
- The Probation Service also report that the use of Intensive Community Orders (ICO) since 2009 has helped divert young adults who have repeat volume offences and more serious offences - away from custody - offering alternatives to custody with better support and reduction of risk.
- The Intensive Community Model is seen as effective because it is built on shared partnerships and values whose primary goal is to promote desistance from offending while taking age, maturity and personal history into account.
- It was also reported that the Communication Screening Tool developed by Calderstones (Mersey Care Whalley) has been effective and could be trialed elsewhere in the region.

5.2. What is not working or is less positive.

Our analysis identified a range of issues and areas that participants felt were not working or could work more effectively. These observations and comments were often complex, nuanced and frequently overlapped in relation to different aspects of provision, support, individual needs and experiences. Compiling this information can be difficult and complex. To facilitate the presentation of this material the report has used a set of sub-headings to organise the material into a coherent reporting structure. However, these sub-headings should not be viewed as fixed or discrete but more as a tool for organising the information and, as such, the following section needs to be considered both section by section and holistically.

5.2.1 Access to Services and Support for Young People.

- Limited or inappropriate support available for young people in the community leading to (inappropriate) police interventions.
- Many young people are anxious but are not able to receive accessible talking therapies or other therapies to help them. This can lead to unnecessary involvement with the criminal justice system or hospitalisation
- Education, Health and Care Plans are often in place but may not be personalized or followed by professionals
- Furthermore, not all children and young people with a disability will have an EHCP. This can especially affect autistic children and young people who do not 'under achieve' against standard criteria but may still not achieve their full potential. This can mean that the individual does not receive appropriate support because no unmet need is perceived due to the way the criteria are set or applied by a school team. This can then lead to anxiety, frustration and difficulties for the child and family.
- There are not enough outreach services and/or first points of contact in all boroughs which means children and young people are not able to access services and support at an early stage. Insufficient community support can lead to inappropriate and unhelpful labelling of young people.
- Some agencies reported an increasing number of young people (aged 16-18) with autism and/or learning disabilities and struggling at home with their families with lockdown and expressing themselves with violence towards their families or themselves.
- Members of the Care, Education and Treatment Review (CETRs) reported that some people are not receiving appropriate specialist community support because there is not enough joined up working between and across different agencies and providers. Some young people and children do not receive support because they are considered to have mental capacity despite the harm they may be doing to themselves.
- There is an absence of alternative support, activities, open access and safe spaces for young people. This was seen to be a result of cuts to

service, lack of understanding of the needs of young people and a lack of engagement and trust with communities and young people.

5.2.2. Training and Expertise.

- Professionals such as the police, mental health and acute hospital staff are not skilled or trained in recognizing learning disabilities or autism. This would require consideration of what additional reasonable adjustments could be made and accommodated by police, mental health and acute hospital staff and could include greater awareness neurodiversity, of differential sensory experiences, inter-personal responses and behaviours and a better understanding of different communication skills and behaviours.
- While some professionals are specially trained and/or experienced in relation to learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health issues this training needs to be extended to all staff who engage with children and young people. This includes developing the understanding and skills required to work with families as partners (where appropriate) to enhance engagement and support with children and young people.
- There is a need for greater training, understanding and specialist support for teachers to help them to support young people with learning disabilities and/or mental health issues more effectively.
- There is not enough focus on personal needs and abilities and approaches to training may be too rigid.
- Questions were raised about the content and relevance of the training statutory staff receive and whether or not those designing and delivering the training possess appropriate experiences and skills to deliver this training to optimum effect.

5.2.3. Issues Involving Diagnosis.

- When children and young people do not have a clear diagnosis, they may not receive appropriate mental health services. This has led to concerns that people may engage in low-level criminal or anti-social behaviour in order in the mistaken believe that this will or may help secure support and help for example, via the criminal justice system.

- The length of time it can take to obtain a diagnosis can have significant impacts on a person's mental health and well-being, their ability to access relevant services and support and their experience of the criminal justice system. For example, magistrates often fail to recognise how long a diagnosis may take and are over-reliant on the existence of a formal diagnosis. This is further evidence of the lack of appropriate training, experience and understanding among key professionals in the criminal justice system and can, again, lead to unnecessary and damaging criminalisation.

5.2.4. Police, Policing and the criminal justice system.

- There can be an absence of understanding of individual behaviours and their significance at point of contact with the police. Police officers do not appreciate how children and young people's learning disability, autism or mental health may affect their understanding of social circumstances, their behaviour, particularly when stressed, frightened, or faced with unfamiliar circumstances.
- Limited or inappropriate support available for young people in the community can lead to (inappropriate) police interventions.
- There can be an over-reliance on the police who may be contacted as an alternative to or in place of more suitable/relevant community services. It was also noted that when police are contacted, they may decide to take no further action which, while positive, can lead to children and young people not being referred to appropriate services and support.
- Young people in the criminal Justice system may not understand the system or related processes. For example, young people outside of court may appear to have be self-assured, however this can be bravado which masks a lack of understanding the situation they are in, or the longer-term implications of their involvement in the criminal justice system.
- Some experts by experience asked for better and more consistent use of reasonable adjustments within the criminal justice system. These include more Easy Read materials, the use of experienced and trained advocates and professionals who understand how to help support and meet the needs of children and young people effectively, greater use of peer and family support

5.2.5. Mentally Vulnerable Offenders Panels (MVOPs).

That the constitution and operating practices of the MVOPs spell across Greater Manchester vary. For many this was a considerable problem as they felt it could lead to inconsistencies, differential outcomes, and confusion among people and/or organisations who engage with different MVOPs. It is worth noting that in various interviews and discussions the importance of the flexibility of responses and processes, and engagement with children and young people's different needs was also valued and even lamented as an absence of practice in some cases.

As the constitution, role and function of Mentally Vulnerable Offender Panels are central to these processes and the project focus they are discussed in more detail in section 7 below.

5.2.6 Schools and Pupil Referral Units.

Schools and Pupil Referral Units were particularly adversely impacted by COVID-19 as this impacted on term lengths, attendance, in-school and extra-curricular activities and the broad range of interactions and activities that take place in and because of schools. Staff in Pupil Referral Units were very supportive of the projects aims and objectives and many wanted to contribute but the impact of COVID-19 made this very difficult and time-pressures and other constraints resulted in significant restrictions on the ability of this group to participate in the research.

- Children and young people who have been excluded from school are given few options to re-integrate into formal education or access alternative ways to progress and develop. This can lead to engagement with gangs and criminality to fill a gap.
- Secondary school teachers are struggling with children's special needs and this has been intensified by the experiences of COVID-19 lockdown.
- Children and young people who have not been diagnosed effectively fall through cracks in service provision, leaving them with increased vulnerability to exploitation by criminals and gangs to participate in forms of crime such as drug transportation. This is especially the case in regard to 'County Lines' and the involvement of vulnerable young people in these activities (Home Office 2020).

- When there are investigations into child exploitation, the length of time that investigations take mean situations are not rectified quickly enough, the children and young people effected may not receive appropriate support and help in time and there is insufficient learning to prevent further instances or future occurrences of exploitation.
- Education professionals and police report that exploitation over social media can occur rapidly with exploitative relationships formed in very short periods of time (for example days or weeks).
- Permanently excluded children and young people can too easily slip off the edge without diversion to services that can help them.
- Furthermore, there is often limited information about and understanding of the impact on the overall health and wellbeing of families, including siblings, that can arise from the permanent exclusion of a family member.
- It can be very hard to reintegrate children and young people back into school once they have been involved with the criminal justice system. This can be for several reasons including reduced timetables and involvement in interventions.
- Students are most often removed from classes where mental health and well-being are covered which leave gaps in their knowledge of how to recognize issues related to mental ill-health and what support and help may be available to them.
- To facilitate interventions and other activities students are often taken out of classes that they enjoy most, are most accomplished in and may have the most relevance to their futures (for example, technology, music, applied subjects). They are never taken out of subjects such as English and Math's.

5.2.7. Families and Carers.

Families (in their broadest sense) and carers are critical to supporting children and young people and helping prevent people becoming involved in the criminal justice system as victims of crime and as offenders. Families and carers also offer specific knowledge and understanding of their family members which may be valuable to professionals and agencies seeking to support children and young people. However, family members and carers may themselves be experiencing

significant difficulties and, again, this has been compounded by the experience of COVID-19 and the associated restrictions. In addition, domestic circumstances and relationships may not always be the safest or most positive environments for young people and children. As with many aspects of this report - the role of families and carers can be complex and contradictory. For example, families in which siblings or parents are or have been involved in crime and/or have or are serving prison sentences can result in negative socialisation and personal experiences that can have negative impacts on other family members (Ministry of Justice 2012).

- Families and carers can demonstrate a lack of understanding of the criminal justice system and how it works (Toker-Lester, 2020).
- Some professionals and statutory agencies reported that the absence of English as a first language can add further layers of complexity.
- Access to suitable translation services can result in translation being undertaken by family members which may not always be optimum.
- Every family needs a crisis support pathway in place telling everyone what services are available and how to access them. This is currently not happening and community agencies are not always aware of families in crisis.
- Once a crisis point is reached some families are not able to cope with the delay involved in being put on a waiting list. There is a need for children, young people and families to access support urgently when they are in crisis.
- Families may often struggle on until a real crisis occurs, such as a serious injury to a family member or a child or young person's experience of violence or involvement in crime. In these circumstances the opportunity to access early and/or more preventive support is missed.
- COVID-19 has heightened the crisis and isolation of families as well as intensifying internal pressures within families amongst children and young people, parents, and carers, siblings, and close friends. This can result in increased mental-ill health and difficulties across family members which may require additional support and intervention.
- Greater recognition needs to be given to the (potential) financial impacts for families when children and young people being excluded from school

and families must make subsequent adjustments to working commitments and patterns.

5.2.8. Systemic Issues.

- Although participants recognized that there may be intent at a senior strategic level to have a more joined-up, holistic approach this needs to be comprehensively shared throughout the system.
- Agencies, statutory bodies, and policy makers should listen to the experiences of children and young people.
- Few senior policy makers and managers within the public sector are from marginalized groups and this does not reflect the demographic make-up of many areas of the Greater Manchester area. Participants suggested that this inhibits the ability of the public sector to fully understand the experiences and needs of the whole community and argued that more diversity within senior roles (which reflected the local population more directly) would lead to better relationships and enhanced policy outcomes.
- The increased narrowing of public sector eligibility criteria has led to young people being lost to services and/or not receiving the support, interventions or help they need and, consequently, may be more open to exploitation by criminal gangs.
- Children and young people frequently experience a lack of friends and relationships. This can be particularly the case where they are out of schools and are not accessing out of school activities. This can result in individuals seeking to fulfil this need for friends elsewhere.
- Regional Learning Disability and Autism Being Safe Group (a regional group made up of peer advocates who are voted onto the group by their peers from Greater Manchester, Cheshire and Merseyside, Lancashire and South) has reported over many years that accessing support to help develop friendships and relationships with people that can be trusted and taking part in community activities and interests is a key priority.

- At regional events - including the North West Regional Learning Disability and Autism Conference - as well as during past engagement work undertaken by Pathways we have been told repeatedly by Experts-by-Experience that not having friendships in the community creates concern and fear when returning to the community from secure hospitals and the criminal justice system as people feel alone and isolated and they may return to friends and habits that are not helpful.
- Local services are not always fully or effectively linked up leading to gaps in support, information sharing and effective interventions.
- There is a lack of cross-over across the different pathways (for example ADHD, autism, learning disabilities and mental health).
- Anxiety and mental-ill health can be exacerbated by the length of time it can take to obtain a diagnosis and support.
- Greater need for 'lower-level' interventions before the intervention of psychologists, psychiatrists, and the necessity of full medical assessments or diagnosis. This might include greater opportunities for young people to have access to social activities, opportunities to work with appropriate role models, opportunities to be involved in community projects and activities, opportunities to talk about their lives and issues they face and to build positive relationships with peers and other community members.
- Although some local and area-based agencies claim to have in-depth knowledge and understanding the local population and their needs this is not always the case and the depth of knowledge and understanding of the local population may be more superficial than these agencies are aware of.
- Some professional and statutory agencies members reported that the system is too dependent on 'good people' rather than the system itself being robust and effective enough to provide consistent support and effective services
- There is insufficient checking, regulation and reporting on service delivery and outcomes which, in part, results from disconnections between policy and the implementation of policy.

6). Mentally Vulnerable Offender Panels².

- It was noted by several participants that the constitution and operating practices of the MVOPs across Greater Manchester varied. For most this was a considerable problem as it could lead to inconsistencies, differential outcomes, and confusion among people and/or organisations who engage with different MVOPs across time and location.
- Previous reviews of the MVOP were perceived as being overly systems focused. It was felt there is scope for a more values-based review including the voices and greater understanding of people with actual experience and their families which would be more likely to lead to systemic and long-term change.
- Concerns were expressed that the effectiveness and consistency of decision making at MVOPs can depend on the individual experience and, understanding of the Greater Manchester Police chair which can impact on the consistency of MVOP decisions and outcomes.
- The timing of the contact with an MVOP for children and young people can be critical to the outcome of that engagement. It was noted that young people must be willing to engage with mental health services and support available through the MVOP process for the panel to divert the individual from (possible) engagement in criminal activity and the criminal justice system.
- However, young people are not always ready or able to engage with services due to the levels of trauma and anxiety they may be facing and may appear unwilling or unable to engage with the support offered. This can mean that young people end up in the criminal justice system and experience outcomes from their involvement with the police which they cannot engage which, in turn, leads to further involvement in the system.
- Engagement with and input from speech and language therapists may be beneficial in these circumstances which would be useful in supporting understanding and effective communication between all involved in supporting/working with children and young people.

² It is noted that a review of these panels will be reported by the Greater Manchester Police later this year.

- However, it is worth noting that in various interviews and discussions the importance of flexibility of responses and processes, of engagement with people and their different needs was valued and even noted as an absence of practice in some cases.
- Of repeated concern was the name of these panels - Mentally Vulnerable Offender Panels - which many found inappropriate, unhelpful and, for some, stigmatising. There was a clear preference for this name to be changed amongst the majority (though not all) participants and this is clearly an important issue for the future.
- Concerns were raised that the name made it appear that the panel name was misleading, it was only for people with mental health needs when it was for people with autism and learning disabilities. It was felt that the panels would benefit from a more positive name.
- It was also noted that the panel name should make it clear what the panels did for all concerned and that it needed to avoid drawing on overly complex or language that people might be unfamiliar with. (The example of neurodiverse was given which while a term that is being used more widely use would not be familiar to everyone).
- Lancashire will be trialling a new version of MVOPs with a different name from October starting with East Lancashire which might be suitable for a trial in the Greater Manchester area.

7). "Everyone is ready for change": Reflections from the team.

Project team members identified the following as key issues emerging from the project:

- The lack of appropriate training of staff around disabilities, autism, and mental ill-health. As noted above this includes both a lack of understanding in general terms regarding learning disability and autism, but it is especially the case in relation to the workings of and exposure to the criminal justice system (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection 2021).
- One criminal justice agency reported that they felt they had sufficient levels of training in place but that as the actual number of individuals with learning disabilities and/or autism they engaged with was so small

staff did not gain enough experience through practice to reinforce this training and to develop direct individual experience. This raises some issues as available data - which estimates that 34% of people in prison in England and Wales have a learning disability or difficulty on assessment at entry to prison (See, for example, Prison Reform Trust 2021) - would appear to challenge this assessment. This provides further evidence of the need to review and assess current approaches to training and how this training is designed, developed and delivered.

- The lack of consistency demonstrated by staff and professionals in terms of their practice. For example, some staff read records and knew how to deal with different medical issues and used this knowledge to modify their practice while others did not.
- Greater access to early intervention is essential as is greater awareness of how and when people can be referred to a multiagency diversion panel.
- Greater need for children and young people to have exposure and access to positive role models and identities. This includes individuals with direct experience of the criminal justice system who can demonstrate that there are alternative routes to those young people may be already experiencing or at risk of entering in to.
- Increasing the opportunities for positive relationships with others which can be limited for children and young people with learning disabilities, autism, or mental health issues.
- Greater emphasis on what works for children and young people with more individually focused interventions, support, and opportunities. This requires greater flexibility in terms of responses to young people, those involved, what support is made available and when.
- Greater opportunities for those with experiences of services and the criminal justice system to become trusted people and trained as listeners. Experts by experience?
- Tensions between statutory requirements and the interests, needs and abilities of children and young people at school.

- The importance of engaging with and supporting families and keeping them in the loop as far as possible. Any plans that are developed for children and young people need to reflect family circumstances and contexts and should be achievable within those contexts.
- The project team also noted the importance of language throughout this project. This not only included the potentially exclusionary nature of specialist terms and professional language terms but also the ways in which some language and ways of speaking are responded to more generally.
- Creating and allowing access to low sensory rooms/spaces within the criminal justice system (for example police stations, magistrates courts) for all children and young people, in particular recognition that not everyone has the same experiences of sensory inputs.
- Clarity of instructions from police officers on the street when engaging with children and young people with learning disabilities, autism, or mental health issues.
- This project has seen the beginnings of a valuable dialogue with communities facing racial injustice and it would be particularly useful if this work could be continued to be supported.
- Although the project has seen the beginnings of a valuable dialogue with communities facing racial injustice it is the case that there remains further work to be undertaken regarding the Gypsy, Romany, and Traveller communities. Our work with these communities was adversely impacted by time scales and COVID-19 which restricted our ability to build appropriate levels of trust and to make positive inroads with these communities in Greater Manchester. However, a member of the project team has good experience of working with these communities across Lancashire (as well as the Asylum Seeker community) we are very keen to see these networks built on to develop further this work with these communities as they are already stigmatised, marginalised and criminalised.

8). Recommendations.

- A coordinated and coherent programme of awareness-raising and specialist training should be developed and delivered to staff working within criminal justice services.
- This training should be designed and developed to raise awareness of neurodivergent conditions and how they impact on communication. It should be supported by practical strategies for working with neurodivergent people in different contexts and settings.
- All future training should be co-developed, informed and co-delivered in with people who have personal experience of neurodivergence. This will encourage greater understanding, discussions and reflection on the experiences faced by neurodiverse people and will enhance overall learning.
- As noted above (section 5.1) there is a ten-point criteria scheme used within criminal justice system to deal with young people in or who have been in care. A similar approach could be extended/developed for young adults with disabilities or autism.
- There needs to be more exploration of how young people can be made to feel a valued member of their community rather than seeking alternative ways of feeling included, valued and safe (for example gang membership).
- Consideration should be given to making further adjustments for those with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health issues across the criminal justice system and related services across the Greater Manchester area. This could include, for example, the creation of low sensory rooms and spaces within the criminal justice system for all children and young people, in particular recognition that not everyone has the same experiences of sensory inputs.
- Serious and urgent consideration should be given to changing the name of Mentally Vulnerable Offender Panels. As noted above, one suggestion for this is Mental Health Diversion and Advisory Panel.
- Criminal justice system agencies should work together and with other statutory and third sector organisations in a coordinated way, to

understand and meet the needs of neurodivergent individuals in the community, prevent offending and support rehabilitation (CJJR 2021).

- Consideration should be given to replacing the term BAME with a suitable alternative. This term is not welcomed by many members of the community and can be unhelpful. One alternative example was suggested by the Greater Manchester Equality Advisory Group (GMEAG). This group has suggested the term Communities Facing Racial Inequalities -followed by the name of the specific community being engaged with - rather than the term BAME.

9). Conclusion

As noted throughout this report there is considerable willing, commitment and desire for effective, sustained, and meaningful change across Greater Manchester in relation to supporting children and young people with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health issues. The experiences of COVID-19 and the pressures and demands this has resulted in makes acting to achieve this change even more important due to the increased demands services and individuals are encountering. There is clearly much expertise, knowledge and experience across the region to develop, support and lead this change but this can only be achieved through more effective holistic, joined-up and innovative practice.

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Appendices

- i. Project Brief
- ii. On-Line Questionnaire (Blank)
- iii. List of organisations involved/spoken to/listened to.
- iv. Appendix iv - Anonymised Case Study - 'M' from the Manchester MVOP Panel.

Appendix i – Project Brief.

Pathways Associates CIC – Engagement and Consultation Project

Introduction

The integrated Health and Justice Strategy for Greater Manchester addresses the needs of some of our most marginalized populations who experience significant health inequalities.

This project will support the Integrated Health and Justice Strategy for Greater Manchester by engaging and consulting with specific marginalized groups to understand how we can build on the strengths and improve services and support for children, young people and the those transitioning to adulthood who are a part of or are at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system and or violence.

The project will be concentrating on two elements to support the work of the Violence Reduction Unit and the work of Health & Justice Learning Disability and/or Autism Steering group and their priorities.

The elements that will be concentrated on will be supporting the review of the Mentally Vulnerable Offenders Panels, and to undertake research relating to the BAME community, learning disabilities and/or autism and the criminal justice system.

The aim of the work will be to reduce exploitation and develop sustainable relationships between marginalized groups and established decision making and advisory bodies.

To achieve the project aims, the project will target its engagement and consultation with marginalized populations including; children and young people up to the age of 26 with learning disabilities, autism, learning difficulties or communication disorders and with members of the BAME community.

It is recognized by Pathways that the term BAME is not welcomed by many members of the community and during the project we will identify a term with community members that may be more acceptable.

The project will also engage with relevant agencies and organizations.

The Lammy Review of 2017, highlighted the Youth Justice System as it's biggest concern with 40% of young people in custody coming from BAME backgrounds, despite making up just 14% of the UK population. Another worrying fact is that BAME men and women make up 25% of prisoners.

We know that people with disabilities and who come from BAME communities will face double or multiple discrimination which may negatively affect their physical and mental health and their experience of engagement with the Criminal Justice System.

The significant health and justice inequalities faced by members of the BAME community is why this project will aim to improve the breadth and quality of engagement with the BAME community.

The project will also look at the issues of children and young people and those transitioning to adulthood; exploitation; and the issue of violence reduction. Despite the projects focus, it will not exclude vulnerable and marginalized female victims of domestic abuse or sexual violence and people who are rough sleeping.

Project Location

Greater Manchester

Who will be affected by the work?

Mentally Vulnerable Offender Panels, which are under review by GMP are inconsistent in practice and application across the region. All areas have an MVOP, however some are restricted only to adults. We recognize that the name in itself needs review and this will form part of the consultation.

Children and Young Adults up to the age of 26 years with Learning Disabilities, Learning Difficulties, Autism, Communication difficulties and members of the BAME community.

GM Youth Justice Teams

Violence Reduction Unit

Police

Courts

GM Learning Disability Confirm and Challenge Group

North West Regional Being Safe and Health groups

GM Learning Disability Parent Forums

GM Autism Criminal Justice Strategy Implementation Group.

Other reporting, decision and engagement groups and CJS agencies.(This list is not exhaustive)

Project Outline

Step 1

Aims and objectives

The Project aims to engage with Children and Young Adults up to the age of 26 years with Learning Disabilities, Learning Difficulties, Autism, communication difficulties, members of the BAME community and Health and CJS agencies. To increase the breadth, engagement and understanding of Health and CJS agencies of these marginalized groups and to facilitate sustainable engagement and the improvement of services.

GMCA may be able to help the project in providing the most up to date demographic profiles of the areas or communities under consideration. However we recognize data may not be available at a level that allows the project to identify some communities. If this is the case, we will aim to talk with intermediary agencies and community groups who may be able to provide a different, localized perspective on who to engage with.

Once we have identified and accessed new people and groups, it may be necessary to take measures that will help to overcome the barriers that have prevented or discouraged groups from taking part in certain forums in the first place. This may involve using interpreters, and organizations being flexible over the timings and structure of their meetings to allow the project to:

- listen to unrepresented opinions, views and attitudes

- develop greater insight and understanding about unmet needs and the potential vulnerability of people with Learning Disabilities, Autistic people and people with Mental Health issues being coerced and persuaded into criminal activity by people believed to be friends (including hate and mate crime)
- Assist in shaping the way services are delivered and ultimately influence future spending and activity.

The engagement and consultation will include;

Members of the Mentally Vulnerable Offender Panels

Children and young people up to 26 years and their families

GM Schools

Directors of Adult Social Services

Directors of Children services

GM Learning Disability Delivery Group

Experts with actual experience and the BAME community throughout the process

GM Youth Justice Panels

Violence Reduction Unit

Greater Manchester Police

Youth Justice Services

GM Learning Disability and Autism Criminal Justice Service Implementation Group

GM Equality Alliance

GM BAME Community Leaders

Greater Manchester Learning Disability Confirm and Challenge Group

North West Regional Learning Disability Being Safe and Health Group

North West Learning Disability Regional Forum

Helen Toker-Lester who has been commissioned by the LGA to research good practice in relation to CJS.

Greater Manchester Autism Consortium and National Autistic Society - including its work in relation to exploitation.

People using Rough Sleepers services such as Centrepoint and other similar agencies

GM Victim Support Services

Women's Victim Support Groups

We would appreciate support from GMCA to connect with relevant people and groups not identified.

Parent Carer Forums

Project Management

We will allocate an associate consultant to manage the project and will establish a project management group to ensure that the main stakeholders are included and are able to contribute to the project development.

The Project Management Group will include.

Representatives from Experts by Experience, Self-advocacy and family-carer organizations

Members from the Greater Manchester Criminal Justice Implementation Group

Greater Manchester Police

Complex safeguarding teams

Early Help teams

Children's and Adults social care teams

Youth Justice Services

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, all or most engagement and consultation for this contract will be delivered online or via the phone. If Government advice changes, we would move to some face-to-face engagement and consultation and would expect stakeholders to provide venues at no cost.

Step 2:

Method of engagement and consultation

Engagement for information - Letting people and agencies know that the project is happening what its aims and objectives are.

Engagement for improvement - Seeking children, young people's families, experts by experience (EbE) and agencies views about current and past situations, services and listening to ideas about improving services. Listening and capturing stories. Utilizing and listening to current groups, forums, individuals and new ones.

Engagement for involvement - Involving people in forums where they are currently not included and allowing people to "let off a little steam" and offer ideas for service improvement.

Final report and feedback to participants, to summarize how the consultation has helped shape any subsequent proposals.

The project will use:

- One to One interviews
- Group Interviews
- Current forums
- A workshop with GM Equality Alliance, Greater Manchester Autism Consortium and National Autistic Society,

- The telephone and internet

Working in Schools

We will approach school governance and offer to talk with children and families via zoom about engagement and consultation. We will develop questions and ask what barriers they believe are preventing them from engaging with various groups and having their voice heard effectively.

We know that some of the groups within the communities we aim to reach are very much self-contained due to culture and/or due to the way they may perceive to have been treated by current established agencies and community groups .

Reaching groups and individuals during this time will need a great deal of listening, some creative thinking, especially when there may be a lack of trust of statutory and not for profit bodies.

We recognize a plan and timeline of how we will achieve our aims and objectives in relation to engagement and consultation is needed. At the same time, we need to be open, flexible and creative with how we approach communities that we may not have actively engaged with or have little true understanding of.

We have costed the project and a delivery timeline, but this may change in consultation with GMCA and the communities we wish to include.

Communication with marginalized groups

Being flexible, creative and open in order to achieve our aim is important. There is a lot of information on-line, some of which is available in easy read, but only if one knows where or how to look. Consultations need to reach everyone to make realistic changes. At the moment without true engagement, consultations will neither be read nor replied to by marginalized communities.

What happens currently is that information is shared by agencies and community groups but often this only reaches those involved in those groups in the first place. We need to think way outside of the box to reach those who are probably most in need.

To put this into perspective, COVID-19 requires social distancing. We are assuming that everyone knows and understands every update, every change,

what the rules are, why we must wear masks, why we need to follow the rules and much more.

Yet there are people who have limited use or no use of technology or have technology but do not know how to use it. Many people, Pathways knows well, are struggling with mental health issues as a direct consequence of Covid-19, and lack of access to groups they previously attended 'face to face' which in turn may make such people break rules and put themselves and others at risk.

Therefore, it is important that Pathways can continue to support participants to utilize technology they own as part of the project; to engage with marginalized communities; and respond creatively to achieve the projects aims.

Step 3:

Final Report

Pathways will produce a report at the end of the engagement and consultation process that will support feedback mechanisms into the project and detail themes, ideas and action resulting from the project and next steps.

We will detail.

Who we spoke with

What we found out

What is working

What needs to change - a set of clear and realistic recommendations

Gaps in service delivery

Ideas for a sustainable way forward and policy development

People's stories

An Easy Read Document will also be produced to ensure the *GM Learning Disability* community is fully informed and included, as well as other marginalized communities involved in this project.

Project Management and Timeline

Activity	Timeline
<p>Engagement for information - Letting people and agencies know that the project is happening what its aims and objectives are and how we intend to meet them.</p>	1st March to April 30th
<p>Engagement for involvement - Organizing a workshop (in the last week of April) with members of <i>GMCA</i>, <i>GM Equality Alliance</i>, <i>Greater Manchester Autism Consortium</i> and <i>National Autistic Society</i> and Members from the <i>Greater Manchester Criminal Justice Implementation Group</i> to begin to understand how we can better engage with marginalised communities and developing an action plan to do it.</p> <p>Involving people in forums where they are currently not included and allowing people to “let off a little steam” and offer solutions and ideas for service improvement. Providing feedback mechanisms into project, to summarize how the consultation has helped shape any subsequent proposals.</p>	4th April to 25th June

<p>Engagement for improvement - Seeking children, young people's families experts by experience (EbE) and agencies including those who are currently involved in MVOP's regarding their views about current and past situations related to services and listening to ideas about improving services and capturing stories. By formulating questions and listening to current groups, forums, individuals and newly engaged people, schools groups and communities. Supporting people to use technology as a method of engagement</p>	<p>4th May onwards</p>
<p>Provide a final detailed report and Easy Read Document to GMCA of the engagement and consultation project and ideas for improvement-moving forward-in a sustainable way - feedback to all those involved.</p>	<p>23rd of July</p>

Appendix ii - On-Line Questionnaire (Blank)

Q1 - What is your name? You do not have to tell us if you do not want to.

Q2 - What is your postcode? We need this to make sure you live or work in Greater Manchester

Q3 - Your role in the system

(Summary Responses)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
a person	6.67%
	2
a family member	6.67%
	2
the police	0.00%
	0
a community leader	3.33%
	1
the fire service	0.00%
	0
a youth worker	3.33%
	1
a professional	66.67%
	20
Responses	13.33%
Other or explain your role in more detail	4
TOTAL	30

Q4 What is your gender?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
female	63.33% 19
male	33.33% 10
transgender female	0.00% 0
transgender male	0.00% 0
I don't want to say	3.33% 1
other, please write your answer in the box	0.00% 0
TOTAL	30

Q5 Which of the following best describes your sexuality?

(Summary responses)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Heterosexual – Straight	80.00% 24
Lesbian	0.00% 0
Gay	3.33% 1
Bi-sexual	3.33%

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
	1
I don't want to say	10.00%
	3
other, please write your answer in the box	3.33%
	1
TOTAL	30

Q6 What is your ethnic group? Tick which one describes your ethnic background the best?

(Summary responses)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
White	83.33%
	25
Asian/Asian British	6.67%
	2
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	3.33%
	1
Mixed ethnic group	0.00%
	0
I don't want to say	3.33%
	1
other, please write your answer in the box	3.33%
	1
TOTAL	30

Q7 What is working in the system for you?

Q8 What do you think needs to change to make things better?

Q9 Do you have any ideas on what plans we can make to help stop exploitation? (Exploitation means taking advantage of someone or treating them unkindly to get their own way.)

Q10 What ideas do you have to help people who do not feel listened to, to have better relationships with people who make important decisions?

Q11 Would you like to see what we find out? Please let us know your e-mail address (if you like)

Appendix iii - List of organisations involved/spoken to/listened to.

Individuals and agencies identified to be involved and listened to during the project.	Who we have listened to	Who we have arranged to listen to	Whose views have been captured in questionnaire or our conversations
Children and young people up to 26 years	2		2
Parent/carers	2		5
Experts with actual experience and the BAME community	1		2
GM Schools	3	5	2
GM Youth Offender Panels	3		
Violence Reduction Unit	1		
Greater Manchester Police	3		2
YOTs	3		
GM Learning Disability and Autism Criminal Justice Service Implementation Group	1		
GM Equality Alliance	1		

Helen Toker-Lester who has been commissioned by the LGA to research good practice in relation to CJS.	1		
Greater Manchester Autism Consortium and National Autistic Society - including its work in relation to exploitation.	1		
People using Rough Sleepers services such as Centrepoin and other similar agencies		1	
GM Housing	1		
ADASS GM	1		
Questionnaire Responses			33
Total		6 (not included in total)	70

GM BAME Community Leaders			
North West Learning Disability Regional Forum			
Greater Manchester Learning Disability Confirm and Challenge Group			
GM Victim Support Services / Women's Victim Support Groups			

GM Romani Community			
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Groups who we were unable to listen to.

Appendix iv - Anonymised Case Study - 'M' from the Manchester Mentally Vulnerable Offenders Panel.

The panel found the information contradictory on the referral due to M's intelligence and therefore no learning difficulties in comparison to the executive functioning age of 10-11. They were focusing on the lack of LD and I reminded the panel I hadn't referred M in on LD grounds but on MH due to undiagnosed need; executive functioning of a 10/11-year-old that left his susceptible to being coerced into crime and if a 10/11-year-old had been referred into the panel on the same grounds, they wouldn't receive a caution.

I explained M had already had intervention delivered to address the crime itself from two separate agencies; he has desisted from offending since the committal of the offence; is unable to cope in college and mum is proactive in addressing his needs and looking into alternative educational placements. We spoke about LANC on 10/11/2020 and hopefully being in receipt of a prescription to calm his symptoms and he will be reviewed by then twice per year and he will be reviewed in January by BIBIC.

The panel were still not of the belief he could be NFA'd due to the serious nature of the offences. I asked what added value they felt a caution would have and they said to impress the importance of not committing the offence again to which I argued that M had already evidenced his learning from mistakes by having desisted for 14 months and already had barriers in his path to overcome. I asked the panel what they would like me to include in the support package when they confirmed a caution was the only way forward and they were unsure what else could be done as the work has already been done and we risk disengagement completely if M must sit through the work again.

The only things they added as ideas were to link in with a drugs worker - I explained that M was unlikely to do this as he was self-medicating with cannabis to calm his symptoms. This was dismissed as 'all young people say that and then progress on to harsher drugs' and for M to be reviewed if he is put on ADHD medication.

Thank you to everyone who has been involved with this project.

About Pathways Associates

Our vision is that disabled people live the lives they choose as equals in society and their local communities. We facilitate the full inclusion of disabled people in community life, through partnerships with disabled people, families and organisations.

We work with disabled people and health and social care services to improve the lives of people and their families.

For more information about our work, visit

www.pathwaysassociates.co.uk