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Evaluation of the Beacon Project

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About this report

Merseyside is one of the 18 areas allocated funding since 2019 by the UK Government to establish a Violence Reduction Unit. To inform the continued development of the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP), in November 2019 (Quigg et al, 2020), July 2020 (Quigg et al, 2021) and June 2021, the Merseyside Academics' Violence Prevention Partnership (MAVPP)¹ were commissioned to evaluate the MVRP as a whole, and selected work programmes. This report forms one of a suite of outputs from the 2021/22 evaluation work programme, and specifically presents an evaluation of the Beacon Project. Additional evaluation reports for 2021/22 explore:

- The overall development and implementation of the MVRP (whole system evaluation; Quigg et al, 2022).
- The whole system approach to reducing reoffending (Timpson et al, 2022).
- The Mentors in Violence Prevention Programme (Butler et al, 2022).
- The Red Umbrella Project (McCoy et al, 2022)
- Operation Empower (Quigg et al, 2022).

Evaluation outputs are available on the MVRP website: www.merseysidevrp.com/what-we-do/

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¹ MAVPP includes academic representatives from Merseyside universities, who represent a range of disciplines including public health, criminology, policing and psychology.

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Executive summary

The Beacon Project is run by the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) Youth Engagement Department. It is an alternative education and skill development course that targets selected children, who meet the course criterion, in primary and secondary schools in Merseyside. MFRS supports a Trauma Informed and Restorative Practice approach to working with children and young people. MFRS's Youth Engagement Department is committed to supporting and building positive relationships between students, staff, managers, parents and partners. These relationships are built on trust and respect, creating the right environment for everyone to thrive and reach their full potential.

This study aimed to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of the Beacon Project, to describe the programme and explore key stakeholder views on the programme and its impacts. This report includes findings from interviews with the Beacon Project staff (n=3), focus groups with the children attending the course (n=30), and teacher reported impact data collected by MFRS for 112 children.

The Beacon Project targets children who may benefit from outside of school activities to develop skills that will assist them through education, and engagement with school and the community. During April to December 2021, MFRS delivered a 6-week Beacon Project Course to 126 primary school children from 11 schools, and a 12-week course to 8 secondary school children from 1 school in Merseyside. Each course was delivered one day per week within community fire stations, with children (and a supporting school staff member) collected from, and returned to, their school by Beacon Project staff each day. Key activities covered during the course included:

- Morning 'check in' to ensure students were physically and mentally prepared for the day.
- First Aid awareness.
- Practical fire service activities e.g., hose drills.
- Teambuilding, communication, and resilience building activities e.g., Rat Run and Smoke House.
- Community safety awareness e.g., home safety, hoax calls and arson.
- Road and water safety.
- Child exploitation / healthy relationships, and for secondary school children violence prevention.
- Team lunch (provided daily as part of the course).
- End of course "pass out" presentation.



The course can be adjusted based on the needs of the school/group or adapted based on relevant issues within the community. Activities are designed to develop confidence, teamwork, communication and resilience. One child's reflection of a task within the course provided an excellent example of how teamwork was developed: "It was about teamwork, so if one of us scored and we won, you would go over to the other team and give them courage to do it" (Child, FG2).

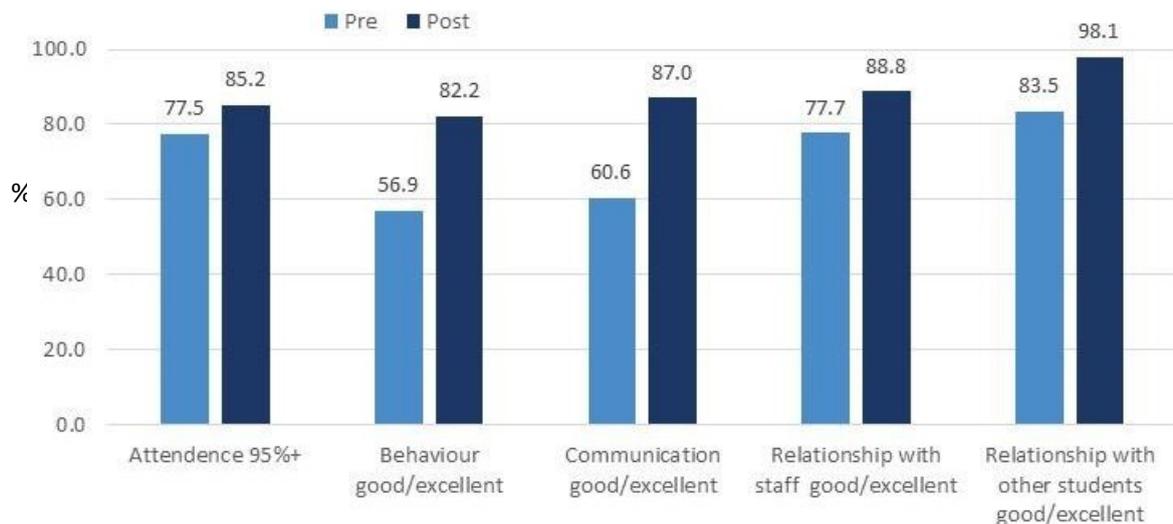
The practical activities were perceived by delivery staff to work well for children who may be engaging in disruptive behaviours or activities within or outside school, as it provides them with opportunities to develop and demonstrate positive behaviours and skills with peers, in a safe yet thrilling environment.

Children, schoolteachers and delivery staff identified a number of key outcomes for the children and community:

“Trying to be noticed by other kids outside of school by being top dogs and by being daring. They've got opportunities to be daring with us, going in the Rat Run. It's a set of cages in pitch black and they have to find their way around. That is thrilling in itself. Going in the Smoke House where they have to go in and they have to rescue dummies and it's filled with smoke and they can't see anything. They've getting their thrills from that. [...] It shows them that there are other ways to be noticed.” (Delivery Partner)

Teacher reported evaluation data collected by Beacon Project staff pre- and post-course revealed statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) improvements in children's behaviour, communication, relationships with staff and relationships with peers (Figure i).

Figure i) Teacher reported child attendance, behaviours, skills and relationships; pre and post intervention



- Enhanced knowledge** - The children displayed the vast amount of knowledge that they had retained during each focus group; this included home and community safety awareness. The distribution of this information has been reported as the children become young safety advocates, sharing information with family and peers.

“I'm absolutely astounded at how much you've learnt in such a small space of time.” (Teacher accompanying FG3)

“My mum is like, how do you know all this from a little small fire course for six weeks on a Wednesday?” (Child, FG2)

- Development of positive opinions of uniformed services** - Some children commented on their previous fear / negative experiences and associations with services such as the police and the fire service. Following their engagement in the Beacon Project, the children displayed an understanding of these organisations as positive role models within the community.

“I’ve always been scared of police and fire engines but now I like them.” (Child, FG2)
- Improved teamwork and communication skills** - Children perceived themselves to have developed teamwork and communication skills. The schools have reported benefits from this, as students are more mature and less argumentative, work better in group tasks, and have formed more positive relationships with staff and other students.

“I love learning how to communicate, how to transport in the dark (cage) through feeling. I’ve just loved the Beacon Course so much.” (Child, FG5)
- Greater sense of achievement, confidence and aspirations** - During the course the children perceived themselves to have developed their confidence during activities, resulting in them having feelings of achievement (which some of them reported having never experienced before). This increase in confidence had a significant impact within schools who reported increased attendance and improved behaviour. In addition to this, children and teachers reported a raise in aspirations as they stived towards a rewarding career to help people.

“We’ve learned how to challenge yourself, cause when we’re at the Smoke House some people were scared to go in, then near the end we were all saying if you don’t do it now, you’ll regret not doing it. Then they ended up pushing themselves and did it. Then when they got out, they were buzzing that they went in.” (Child, FG6)

The Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP) were cited as a key facilitator to programme implementation, as through using information from the MVRP Data Hub, the project was targeted towards schools in areas with the highest levels of violence, and/or risk factors for violence. Further, the MVRP team were instrumental in funding the intervention and building relations and partnerships between the Beacon Project Team and target schools, particularly where such relationships did not exist. The role of the MFRS as delivery partners and their engagement with the children as an external agency outside of the school environment was perceived to be a key facilitating factor for the success of the Beacon Project. Additionally, it was perceived that the fire station’s reputation as a trustworthy organisation assisted with the initial uptake of the Beacon Project by schools and the subsequent support provided by schools throughout. This partnership enabled Beacon Project staff to clearly communicate the aims and reach of the project, ensuring the school sent children who would benefit the most from the course. The school’s involvement throughout was noted as vital, as support staff sent to accompany the children can report directly back and extend praise back into the school environment. A lack of school support meant that the Beacon Project was more difficult to implement.

The short-term funding from the MVRP (the sole funder of the intervention) presents a key barrier as the project is limited in extending its reach (e.g., by employing more staff and delivering more courses). If the Beacon Project was to expand and develop, it is suggested that more than one course should be offered to certain schools. This follows comments from headteachers who state that they have more children who would benefit from the project. For the Beacon Project to remain sustainable,

it is also vital that the content and structure remains adaptable to changing issues within school and society, as the nature of the Beacon Project is to address community issues and challenges the children are facing.

In summary, Beacon Course offers a unique learning environment for children to learn about safety within the community whilst developing key skills through practical activities. This study revealed a number of key facilitators for the project surrounding partnerships with the MVRP and schools. For the project to expand and increase its reach, more secure, long-term funding is required to employ more staff and ensure partnerships with schools remain consistent. The outcomes of the Beacon Project are significant for the children and the wider community, as skills developed and knowledge acquired allow students to become young safety advocates. A quote from a Beacon Project delivery partner provides a fantastic reflection on the project's aims and its overall impact:

“The aim of the project is to create safety ambassadors within our community to empower children to make better life choices. It's about empowering children to build their confidence and develop their teamwork, supporting them to work with others... to give those children the tools that they need in life to support them in making better life choices.” (Delivery Partner)

1. Introduction

As part of the wider system evaluation of the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP), the Public Health Institute, LJMU, were commissioned to evaluate the Beacon Project. The Beacon Project is an alternative education and skill development course, targeted towards children who may benefit from engagement in safe, fun, enriching and unique experiences outside of school. A therapeutic environment is provided, with trauma informed approaches used to promote children's engagement, supporting children to develop healthy relationships whilst improving personal, social and educational development. This proactive intervention aims to improve children's school attendance, whilst reducing the number of those excluded from mainstream education. The courses are designed by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) Youth Engagement Team, and is delivered by the team, with a ratio of two delivery partners to 12 students; this allows for children to positively engage with a uniformed service. Overall, the project provides children with the opportunity to build their confidence by celebrating small achievements, developing key skills and providing them with positive role models to raise their aspirations. Throughout the course, delivery partners reinforce the negatives of antisocial and violent behaviours, encouraging the students to discuss the potential consequences, not only for themselves, but for the whole community.

The project offers a 6-week course for primary school children and a 12-week course for secondary school children, run one day a week during school term times. Both courses are similar aside from length and delivery style, with the secondary school course holding more of an educational element. The programme educates the students on first aid, wellbeing, safety in the community, and road and water safety. The programme also offers practical activities to instil fundamental Fire Service principles, developing leadership, confidence, resilience, communication, and teamwork. The aim is to equip children with knowledge, positive attitudes and skills that can be taken back into the classroom and community, with students becoming young safety advocates, and sharing lessons learnt with family and peers.

1.1 Study aims and objectives

The study aims to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of the Beacon Project delivered across Merseyside. The evaluation had two core objectives, which include a number of research questions.

1. To monitor, document and describe the development of the Beacon Project (process evaluation).
 - To describe the implementation of the Beacon Project, including programme content and delivery;
 - To elicit the facilitators and/or barriers to programme delivery; and,
 - To identify areas for development and sustainability.
2. To assess the perceptions and impacts of the Beacon Project (outcome evaluation).
 - To explore Beacon Project staff and children's perceptions of the programme; and,
 - To identify outcomes and impacts for children, exploring knowledge, attitudes and behaviours.

2. Methodology

To meet study objectives, a range of methods were implemented with findings triangulated to inform the process and outcome evaluation.

2.1 Methods

2.1.1 Review of project documentation

The Beacon Project is well established, meaning a vast amount of documentation and materials to assess delivery and impact were provided by the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) Prevention Directorate. This included an overview of the project's funding bids to the MVRP, detailing aims, targeted reach and feedback information from previous courses.

2.1.2 Stakeholder semi-structured interviews

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders who had a key role in the implementation of the intervention (n=3). Interview length ranged from 24-56 minutes and were conducted online. Interview questions focused on: perceptions of programme content and delivery, including any adaptations; the process for identifying and recruiting children; factors supporting and impeding implementation of the Beacon Project; areas for development; and perceived impacts on children and wider context.

2.1.3 Focus groups

Six focus groups were conducted with the primary school children (n=30), each completed on the final (sixth) week of the course. Focus groups took approximately 25 minutes and were carried out in person. Focus groups explored: experiences and understanding of the project; factors supporting and impeding implementation of the Beacon Project; areas for development; and perceived impacts on the individual and within a wider context.

2.1.4 Impact surveys

Feedback and evaluation data collected by MFRS for each completed course included a School Pre-Course Referral and School End of Course Assessment; both assessing children's exclusions, attendance information and attitudinal changes to measure the impact. Additionally, Teacher Evaluation, Student Evaluation and Parent/Guardian Evaluation forms were provided for complete courses. Overall, a summary of the data for each completed course was provided, compiling all the information collected through delivery, including: details of course and participants, reasons for referral, activities completed, summary of the course, barriers, and student, school and parent feedback.

2.2 Data analyses

Quantitative analyses were undertaken in SPSS (v27) using descriptive statistics. Wilcoxon signed-rank tests to examine if changes in teacher reported child outcomes pre-post intervention were statistically significant. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data from interviews and focus groups [1]. The analysis is presented with illustrative quotes where appropriate to highlight key findings.

2.3 Ethical approval

Ethical approval was obtained from Liverpool John Moores University.

3. Findings

3.1 Pre-programme context

3.1.1 Background of the Beacon Project

The Beacon Project was developed in 2001² in response to youth antisocial behaviour (ASB) and youth attacks targeting firefighters. Delivered by the Youth Engagement Team within Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS), the project aimed to engage with at risk children to create young ambassadors within the community, reducing attacks, fire setting, and antisocial behaviour. In 2009 MFRS was awarded the Guardian Public Services Award for Service Delivery, Children and Young People. This established MFRS as a leader in youth engagement, creatively using resources to target the Every Child Matters five outcomes. The project was initially funded by the local authority, however, due to funding issues the Beacon Project was paused for a period of four years, from 2016-2019, with staff diverted to deliver other youth engagement programmes across Merseyside during this period³. Following funding from the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP) in 2019/20, the Beacon Project was reinstated. The aim of the project is to nurture children to become safer community ambassadors, build their confidence, self-esteem and teamwork and inspire them to raise their aspirations. The project is targeted towards children who are socially excluded, and/or are at-risk of anti-social behaviour or violence (and/or underlying risk factors).

MFRS supports a Trauma Informed and Restorative Practice approach to working with children and young people. MFRS's Youth Engagement Team is committed to supporting and building positive relationships between students, staff, managers, parents and partners. These relationships are built on trust and respect, creating the right environment for everyone to thrive and reach their full potential.

3.2 Implementation process

Recruitment for each Beacon Course commenced with the MVRP Intelligence Hub who produced reports highlighting schools to target (based on levels of violence / risk factors for violence in the community). The MVRP education lead then contacted the schools to explain the project, advising that the MFRS youth manager will be in touch to liaise. It was then the school's responsibility to select 12 children for the course, who met one or more of the following referral criteria provided:

- Children in their transition to secondary school (primary only).
- Children who have been exposed to trauma / adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).
- Children experiencing poor attendance.
- Children involved in risk taking behaviour, close to exclusion, involved in ASB.
- Children socially excluded in less obvious ways are also eligible - young carers, children with disabilities, looked after children, children from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Each cohort was then delivered for one day a week within a MFRS station during school term times, with primary school courses lasting 6-weeks, and secondary school courses lasting 12 weeks. During April to December 2021, MFRS delivered a 6-week Beacon Project Course to 126 primary school

² In February 2006, MFRS became the first fire service in the UK to be nationally awarded with Beacon Status for Early Intervention (Children at Risk).

³ During this time, the MFRS were awarded the Matrix Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance.

children from 11 schools, and a 12-week course to eight secondary school children from one school in Merseyside.

3.3 Beacon programme content and delivery

3.3.1 Aims and Target Group

The aim of the Beacon Project has developed since it initially began in 2001. The Beacon Project delivery staff report how the initial focus was on ASB, creating young “ambassadors within the communities to reduce fire setting, antisocial behaviour and attacks on firefighters”. Now, the project is more broadly based around targeting selected children, who meet the course criterion, “to give them the tools that they need to keep themselves safe through life”. This includes children who may have experienced ACEs or trauma, are associated with troubled families or peer groups, or are involved in risk taking behaviours with poor school attendance.

One delivery partner explained the benefits of expanding the reach of the Beacon Project to target a variety of children, not just those who are involved in ASB. They explained how they used to think the project was about “knife crime and reducing the violence on our streets, which it is about, but you also get children [...] who've had really traumatic experiences [who] may not necessarily be involved in crime, but because they've had traumatic experiences, they'll withdraw. They can't engage and that has a knock-on effect, because if they're not engaging, they're not learning and as they grow up, then they're learning- I'm not really clever, so I can't achieve that. So, they don't have aspirations, they think I can't do anything and that comes from a traumatic experience, not necessarily from a violent crime”.

The Beacon Project aims to provide children with safe, fun, enriching and unique experiences outside of the school environment. It uses Fire Service principles of self-discipline, leadership and teamwork to encourage personal, social and educational development. Working with the Fire Service also provides the opportunity to engage with a uniformed service in a positive way as they learn to become safety advocates, improving social and morally responsible behaviour. Overall, the Beacon Project aims to improve school attendance and to reduce the number of pupils being excluded from mainstream education. Through this alternative education and skill development course the children are given the opportunity to achieve, meaning they often return to school the next day “with a positive attitude that as they had a good day yesterday”.

“It’s about making safer communities and giving children, if they have ACEs or they have trauma in their life, showing them that you know there are positive role models out there and you can aspire to be anything you want. [...] It's about engaging with children and giving them a voice.”
(Youth Advocate MFRS)

“The aim is to develop that teamwork, to develop their self-esteem and their confidence.” (Youth Advocate MFRS)

It is also important to note that the students attending the Primary Course believed that they had been selected to attend the course randomly, or because they had shown good behaviour - “In year 5 they put everyone’s name in a hat or something and they just pick it out” (Child, FG1). The Beacon Course is described and perceived as a privilege to attend.

3.3.2 Design and Delivery Style Overview

The Beacon Project offers two courses that run one day a week: one primary school course (six weeks) and one secondary school course (12 weeks). The courses are delivered by two MFRS Youth Advocates, with up to 12 children on each course. When possible, local community fire stations are used, providing they can accommodate student's needs, such as, available changing facilities and training rooms. The course starts at 10am and concludes at 2.30pm. Transport to and from school is provided, as well as a packed lunch for each day.

Overall, the Beacon Project is designed to deliver alternative education whilst developing key skills. It is a rounded approach that continually evolves to address relevant issues within the community, whilst developing engaging activities for the children. The primary and secondary courses are similar aside from length and delivery style. The secondary course typically holds more of an educational element, exploring issues more in depth. Whilst the primary course utilises games to explain educational components and skills. The programme can be tailored to the school's needs, for example, to focus on local community issues such as fire starting or knife crime.

The delivery partners follow a "scheme of works" which is a planned-out schedule of activities and lessons for the day. However, one delivery partner stated that while they follow a schedule, the children "wouldn't know it was a scheme of works because it's such a fast pace". The structure is described as half classroom-based and half firefighting activities that work on developing key skills. It is also reported that all activities are developed around three key stands: "teamwork, working with others and communication".

"We do half firefighting - so work on teamwork, resilience, communication and then half will be in the classroom working on key skills like home fire safety, arson, ASB within the community, what makes a community, positive role models." (Youth Advocate MFRS)

"A lot of what we're delivering now is really holistic and it's really important that the Beacon is a rounded course, it's not just all about fire service activities, [...] there's got to be an educational element and there's got to be a development opportunity for children to come on the course." (Delivery Partner)

On the first day, the children are informed that they will be integrated with different people in the group to push them outside of their comfort zone, in order to develop their teamwork and confidence. This has been reported to be beneficial to schools who send mixed year groups.

"Some schools will refer two year groups, and the feedback that we get from parents and from the school is very much that they wouldn't have made friends with these other children, let alone friends with somebody from a different year group or from a different class. So that's been a huge benefit and the school have reaped that benefit as well." (Delivery Partner)

3.3.3 Programme Activities

The course can be adapted to the schools/pupils needs; however, the following section provides an overview of the general scheme of works delivered by the Beacon Project:

- Wellbeing, health awareness, first aid (Inc. knife savers first aid)
- Practical fire service activities (hose drills/youth breathing apparatus/hydrant drills/foam making equipment/search and rescue techniques)
- Teambuilding, energiser and communication tasks
- Relationships and resilience building activities
- Community safety awareness – safety in the home/fire escape plans/bonfire and fireworks safety, hoax calls, arson, ASB in the community, exploitation
- Road safety, water safety

The subsequent section provides detailed insight into some of the activities delivered on the Beacon Course.

Wellbeing

Every day will start with a 'check in' to ensure the children are okay, nothing has happened at home or in the community, and they're okay to proceed with the day's activities. This physical and emotional check in is something that has been developed within the course across the years and is in place to ensure the staff are aware and prepared to cope with behaviour resulting from events prior to the day. This is accompanied by some breathing and relaxation techniques.

"We'll do breathing exercises, relaxation and, say okay if you've had a bad day and you're not feeling great, let us know. If we're aware of it, we'll know that maybe if you've kicked off [become upset], it might have been because of that. So, there's lots of new things, restorative practice, and things that we've brought in." (Youth Advocate MFRS)

Skill Developing Practical Firefighter Drills

Rat Run: This activity consists of cages that the children will have to find their way through in the dark. This requires constant **teamwork** and **communication** with the person behind them as one delivery partner describes how "if they turn left, or if the turn right, they have to tell the person behind that they're turning left or turning right, otherwise they lose them". Alongside the enjoyment of this task "the underpinning learning from that for them is really invaluable". This task enhances the child's sense of achievement, as "once they've done it, their sense of achievement is really good" (Delivery Partner).

The rat run is also designed to develop **confidence** and **resilience** within the children as they overcome their fears. Following this task, the word resilience is then discussed as the children are asked to consider when they might use resilience in real life. One delivery partner described the types of discussions that take place:



“Then we say in life, where else could we use resilience? We're using it in the rat cage, so if we're doing an exam, if we're studying, if we don't want to go out with a certain group, because of bad behaviour or anything, then we use resilience. So, you can relate everything we do, every activity to real life scenarios.”

“We'll say, well when else do you think you might be nervous and you don't want to do something? And they'll say maybe when I go to senior school. But then we'll say - but look at the way you feel now, you didn't want to do it and then you've done in and now you feel brilliant because you've done it. And that happens a lot in life. You go for a job interview, you're nervous before you go, you do the job interview and then you get the job done. It's all about confidence.”

The Smokehouse: In small groups the children go into a dark house filled with smoke to rescue two dummies. “It's a house and it's filled with smoke and it's dark. We had to climb up stairs and we learned how to save people inside it” (Child, FG1).

There is a focus on **teambuilding** and **communication** as the children rely on each other to navigate their way through the room. One child described how they did this by putting their “hands on each other's shoulders”. One child in FG6 described the benefits of this - “If anyone got hurt or lost, the person who's in the middle would know, because the persons got hold of his shoulder, so if he lets go we all stop and look behind us.”

To avoid the obstacles the children learnt a technique called “shuffle and sweep”. This involved shuffling the feet forward and using the arms in a sweeping motion to check if the pathway was clear.



Overall, the Rat Run and Smokehouse were commonly cited as the favourite activity by the children within the focus groups. These activities give the children a chance to be ‘daring’, to work on key skills and to develop their confidence and sense of achievement. One delivery partner described these practical activities as working well for those who are “trying to be noticed by other kids outside of school by being daring. They've got opportunities to be daring with us, going in the rat run. It's a set of cages in the pitch black and they have to find their way around. That is thrilling in itself. Going in the smokehouse where they have to go in and they have to rescue dummies and it's filled with smoke and they can't see anything. They're getting their thrills from that. [...] It shows them that there are other ways to be noticed”.

The Pipe Game: This activity involves the group being split into two teams, with each group working together using pipes (cut in half) to lead a golf ball through to a bucket at the end. If the ball drops out, the team will have to start again. This activity reinforces the importance of **teamwork** and **communication**.

“There was a bucket and you had to try and keep them in the air without falling, with teamwork. When it passes your thing, you run to the end to stop it from falling.” (Child, FG6)

“They’re working as a team to get the ball through the pipe and get to the bucket [...] and afterwards we say well you worked as a team. You supported that person. You struggled and they helped you. Everything is geared towards team working and how not giving up can make you succeed.” (Youth Advocate MFRS)

Whilst each team competes, the children are encouraged to support each other. One child in FG2 recounts how this occurred within their group - “It was about teamwork, so if one of us scored and we won, you would go over to the other team and give them courage to do it.”

Practical Fire Service Activities

Throughout the course the children are taught practical fire service activities such as Hose Drills. These teach the children about the fire service, whilst reinforcing **teamwork**, **communication** and the **value of hard work**.

“If you squirt the water from the fire engine using the hose, you’ve then got to take out water from the hose, which sounds simple enough, but it’s actually quite hard work. And then you’ve got to roll up those hoses, which for a lot of children is a real energetic activity and some of them don’t like doing the hard work. They want the fun stuff, like climbing the ladders and squirting the water, but they have to understand that to get from there to there, there’s a lot of hard work that involves teamwork, communication, and working with your group as a team.” (Delivery Partner)



First Aid

On the course the children are educated on basic first aid training, so they feel more equipped with the skills to help people. This includes checking for danger, when to call for an ambulance, and when/how to perform CPR. One child in FG1 reported first aid as being their “favourite activity”.



Community Safety Awareness

To develop a sense of safety within the community the Beacon Course educates on topics such as arson and hoax calls. One child describes listening to “a couple of calls to see if they were fake or not” and learning not to waste emergency services’ time.

For sessions on arson, one delivery partner reported having “arson advocates who come in and talk about the after-effects of arson”, including working to frame police and other role models within the community in a positive light. Overall, the delivery partners support the students to consider their own and other people’s actions within the community, reinforcing positive relationships “with everybody; with school, with society”.

“We know with a lot of ours, the relationship they have with the police, particularly those who are very challenging and may be allowed to stay out late at night. The “bizzies” (police) are the enemy for them, and they've already started off with that attitude. But we will talk about the police in a positive way. [...] Because it's somebody else telling them, it tends to sink in a bit better.” (Youth Advocate MFRS)

Road Safety: As part of their educational development within the course the children are taught about road safety. The staff use engaging delivery methods such as a road safety song for the primary school children. There will also be facilitated discussion surrounding road safety and the community.

“We'll talk about road safety, about dangers of the road. You have a nice little song, we sing at the end of it. And then they'll feedback to us what they think road safety is, and do they have a lollipop person in their community? Or what does the lollipop person do - they serve the whole community.” (Youth Advocate MFRS)

“So what we’ve been doing is learning how to be safe and how if you see anyone passed out or hurt, then how to care for them. Road safety, and it’s really good to learn about it, just to be safer.” (Child, FG1)

Water Safety: This educational component of the course is also delivered in an engaging way. Previously, water safety would be taught in a classroom, however delivery staff described how “now we go down to our floating fire station on the Dock Front and they deliver water safety. They show all the children all the boats and everything, they explain their role - that they’re firefighters, that their fire station is on the River Mersey and they patrol the River Mersey. So it's a fun way of teaching them. A lot of children don't do well in a classroom environment, and so to bring them outside of that classroom environment and that peer group, to learn in a completely different way is great for children”.

Safety in the Home: The children are also educated on safety in the home, for example checking the smoke alarm or leaving candles by curtains. This increases safety awareness, but also for some children this increases home ownership and can be empowering. This is shown as one of the delivery partners described what discussions they have with the children in attempt to make them safety advocates within the home and community - “We say you're part of the fire service family, we want you to go home, to get your adult and check the smoke alarm and then they take ownership of their house a little bit. Then go ask your parents if you have a smoke alarm? Of a night do you unplug all your plugs, and they go - Oh no I leave my charger on, then we say oh well you shouldn’t do that. And then they take the charge, so it's giving them a lot of ownership in the home, 'cause some of the children we work with, they probably haven't got that structure in the home department? It's empowering them a little bit”.

Pass out

'Pass out' is a practical fire drill presentation, completed on the final day. For this, each child is given a job, e.g. First Aider or Rescuer. Usually, funders, representatives from the school, parents, family and friends would be invited to watch, however, during COVID-19 this was no longer possible. During interviews, delivery partners noted how normally, when the parents see it, they're "just filled with glee. Just seeing the children in a fire kit and a helmet is just amazing for the parents, they can't stop taking photographs, they're as proud as anything. So proud of the children and for us, I think because we haven't been able to do that. I think normally when the parents walk away from that pass out presentation, they normally have that connection with the fire service because for many of their parents it's probably the first time that they've been into a fire station and so normally we connect with the parents as well".

Following the practical presentation there is a certificate giving. The primary school children receive a certificate of completion and a First Aid certificate. Additionally, secondary school children receive a 'most improved student' and 'most outstanding student' certificate. This gives the children a chance to reflect on the experience and celebrate their achievement. One delivery partner described how the primary school children are "so thrilled at it, they sit with it on the desk, and they sit and stare at it. And for some of them it might be the first time they've received a certificate of achievement".

3.4 Facilitators to programme implementation

This section discusses the factors which facilitated the implementation of the Beacon Project. MFRS delivery partners identified a number of facilitating factors to programme implementation including:

Support from the MVRP: After the Beacon Course had been paused for a number of years, funding from the MVRP has allowed the project to re-establish itself. Alongside the funding the MVRP also has a key role in identifying target areas and schools. Thus, using data from the MVRP Data Hub on levels of serious violence and risk factors for violence, schools in areas most at risk of violence were identified as key targets areas for programme delivery. The MFRS Youth Manager, who liaised with the MVRP and schools, described how they previously looked at "fire service data and hot spot areas and then approached schools that fit within that criteria". However, they then continued to describe how initially finding the right contact within that school can take weeks, resulting in a lot of time wasting. With MVRP support, a key facilitating factor to this process was the MVRP education lead and their role in continually providing contacts, communicating with the headteachers directly to "explain the MVRP, to explain why their school's being selected, attached information about the Beacon, gave my contact details and advise the school that I'll be in touch in the next couple of days. And that process has worked so smoothly."



"They've been really supportive and a very easy partner to have."
(Delivery Partner)

Partnerships with schools: The fire service's positive reputation within the community was seen as a key facilitator when developing partnerships with the schools and implementing the course. It is perceived that MFRS is a "reputable organisation and a 'can do' organisation and that badge that we wear, it's greeted well" (Delivery Partner). The fire service can develop trusting relationships with schools. This partnership is vital when selecting children to attend the course; when there is a lack of communication, schools can send pupils "randomly and without purpose." (Beacon Course Summary report, Secondary data).

The value of these trusting collaborative partnerships is not only relevant for the initial uptake for the Beacon Project, but also for the involvement of the school throughout the course. One delivery partner noted that enhanced partnership work with the school facilitates the programme and the outcomes for the child. If the schools send a support worker/classroom assistant this allows for good networking as they can report directly back to the school “and they're able to say - you were brilliant yesterday, or - oh, miss, you know him yesterday, he was brilliant”. This not only benefits the school, but the children too as the praise and positive associations with the Beacon Project is extended to the school environment.

Role of the Youth Engagement Team: The two delivery partners who deliver the Beacon Project are highly qualified with many years of experience engaging with children. Their approach as an external agency, within a more relaxed environment, allows for a trusting and impactful relationship with the children - “With the schools, they might say that teacher doesn't like me, or I hate school, or I don't like this. But somebody else from outside saying it well, you know the schools there to help you, and it's hard for your teacher, 'cause if your teacher has to teach you this and you're messing about, it's hard for them? And because it's somebody else telling them, it tends to sink in a bit better because it's not just the teacher saying I've got to teach everybody, not just you, and because we have that quite easy going relaxed atmosphere here” (Delivery Partner, MFRS).

This approach is evidenced within the focus groups as one child stated that “they feel like [they're] my friends and good friends, best friends, everything”. This positive relationship between the Youth Engagement Team and children was reflected throughout all the focus groups.

“Amazing.” (Child, FG6)
“Funny.” (Child, FG6)
“The kindest people.” (Child, FG3)
“They're probably the best fire people teachers ever.” (Child, FG6)

3.5 Barriers to programme implementation, areas for development and sustainability

Limited Funding: Delivery staff responsible for organising the funding for the project, reported that currently the Beacon Project only has capacity to deliver five courses a week with two full-time staff. This is due to the MVRP funding being for “relatively short periods of time”. It is thought that if the funding was for longer, the Beacon Project could “take on more staff and increase the amount of Beacon Courses that we're delivering”.

Increase Number of Courses Offered Within a School: Delivery partners were confident in the MVRP's ability to select schools with children to target, however, one delivery partner would like more involvement in MVRP decisions to deliver more than one course within a school. This is based on headteacher's feedback, who have asked the MFRS to do the course again; “they say- I've got more than 12 in this school that would benefit”. Overall, for the Beacon Course to develop it is believed that “it shouldn't just be one school and that's it. [...] We should be returning to these schools and maybe target a school a term”.

“We're only reaching a tiny amount of the students that would benefit from it just by doing 12 in one school.”
(Youth Advocate MFRS)

This approach is perceived to benefit the Beacon Course by reaching more children who are eligible for the course within each school, but also allows the fire service to develop more of a partnership with the schools. The Youth Manager believes that “it's important not to just parachute into a school, deliver the Beacon and then leave. I think it's really important to try and develop relationships within that school”. Therefore, it has been proposed that the number of courses should be reduced from five a week to four. This allows “the staff and myself a little bit of breathing space to put different measures in place, so that extra day, it could be that a school that we've worked with previously, we go into that school to deliver a range of sessions. [...] It just enables us to keep that link with the school, so the school are developing that partnership with us”.

“I suppose that's one of the highlights of the fire service really, that the staff are very good at what they deliver, and we have lots of sessions. Some sessions we still haven't delivered because we just can't fit them all in. But we've developed lots of packages that are good to go and we're able to deliver online; we're able to deliver virtually, face to face in schools at fire stations. So, we're very well prepared for all circumstances.” (Delivery Partner)

Adaptability and Preparedness: To remain sustainable the Beacon Project staff emphasised how they need to continually develop training needs and programme content to adapt to societal changes and the school's needs - “I think as time goes on and society is changing, you know, you are going to amend to the needs of that community. So, if you're working in a certain community, they might have high gun and knife crime in that community, whereas another community could have arson. So, you've always got to change” (Delivery Partner, MFRS). The Beacon Course is prepared with a range of materials on various topics that can be implemented as required to meet the children's and community's needs, alongside content to enable online delivery should that be needed.

3.6 Impacts on children

3.6.1 Knowledge Acquired

Throughout the six-week primary school course, the large volume and detail of information retained by children following completion of the course has shocked parents and schoolteachers accompanying the children on the course. This is evidenced throughout all the focus groups as the students described the tasks they've undergone in detail and the things they've learnt about the fire safety, making hoax calls, road safety, and first aid.

“I'm absolutely astounded at how much you've learnt in such a small space of time.”
(Teacher accompanying FG3)

“My mum is like, how do you know all this from a little small fire course for six weeks?”
(Child, FG2)

Fire Safety

The students displayed their knowledge of safety within the home by discussing safety measures to prevent a fire, firework safety and what to do if there is a fire.

“I learnt if you see a fire in your house just put a blanket over it and stand on it.” (Child, FG1)
“You should never put wires under carpet, or blow out the candles and don't put it lit by curtains.” (Child, FG3)
“I learnt not to play with fire.” (Child, FG5)
“Always if you're going to lite a firework, make sure you're with a parent.” (Child, FG6)

Hoax Calls

During a hoax call lesson, the Beacon Project participants “learned not to prank call the fire service and police” (Child, FG6). During this the impact of these calls were discussed, recalled within the focus groups, a child in one group explained that “you’re just wasting them time and they could be going to a real massive fire” (Child, FG6). Whilst another student acknowledged that it’s putting other people who are in a real fire in danger” (FG6).

Road Safety

The teaching methods used to engage the primary school children appears to be effective. For example, across focus groups, participants sang the road safety song – “Look, stop, listen, think. Look, stop, listen, think.” (Children, FG1, 5, 6). A child in one group reported singing the song in their head every time they cross the road now. Additionally, another child reinforced how “if you’re younger you have to hold your parent’s hand then cross the road” (Child, FG1), whilst another child reported that “if you have a child with you, put them, not on the side of the road but the other side [...] and if you’re at the main road then go to a zebra crossing” (Child, FG3).

First Aid

Prior to the Beacon Course most children reported having few first aid skills - “I knew how to put bandages and plasters on but that’s about it, so I didn’t know what else to do for first aid”. Within the focus groups one child perceived first aid as being their main skill gained, whilst participants in another group described it as having the biggest impact “in case someone is dying and you have to help them” (Child, FG2).

The level of detail recalled by the students was impressive as they described step-by-step measures that should be taken; this was named DR ABC- “Danger. Response. Ambulance. Breathing. CPR” (Child, FG6).

“Yeah, so you check for danger, then you walk up to them and check if they’re awake and if they don’t respond you pinch their ear, then if they don’t respond you pick up the phone then call the ambulance, then you do CPR until the ambulance get here.” (Child, FG6)

Becoming Young Advocates

The knowledge acquired not only impacts the individual attending the course, but also the wider community, extending beyond the six/twelve weeks by making each participant a young safety advocate for the community. One delivery partner described how this occurs, using an example of one child going home and teaching others what they’ve learnt - “They’re young advocates for us. We give them a little T shirt with a little fire logo on and they love it and we do shuffle and sweep, in case of a fire, and one of the children said - I went back and showed my nan shuffle and sweep in case the house goes on fire and then the nan give us feedback saying he was teaching us, if there was a fire in the house, what we should do, the fire escape plans and what we should do, and he was telling us to check the smoke alarm once a week. So, it affects the whole community” (Youth Advocate MFRS).

This is evidenced within the focus groups as individuals reported that they tell their family and friends about first aid, with one participant sharing how they “taught my brother how to do that (recovery position)” (Child, FG2). Other students reported anticipated long-term benefits,

“I take all the information home to my mum and tell her.”
(Child, FG2)

sharing information learnt throughout their life - “when I have kids, I can teach them first aid too, and teach them everything I’ve learned today” (Child, FG2).

In the long-term, it is hoped that these young advocates are not only sharing information about safety but also framing the fire service and other community organisations in a positive light, making the organisation feel like a trusted part of the community - “I think the wider impacts are the fact that the parents and the guardians have a better understanding of the fire service” (Delivery Partner).

Overall, these young advocates have learnt valuable life skills that they have then taken back to the classroom to share with peers. One delivery partner hopes that following on from this education, individuals condone ASB in peers; “If somebody is getting up to something that they shouldn’t do, you’d like to think that people that have done the Beacon Courses will be saying -, you can’t do that, or don’t do that, it’s mean or don’t make a hoax call because... and then they can educate somebody else” (Youth Advocate MFRS).

“The children have looked forward to coming each week and have learnt valuable life skills that they have passed on to their classmates.”
(School Teacher, Secondary data)

3.6.2 Changed opinions of uniformed services

Prior to the Beacon Course most children knew nothing about the fire service - “I didn’t know a thing about the fire service until I got here” (Child, FG6). This child continued to explain how previously they “didn’t know that they save people I just thought they put fires out and leave”, but now “I know more about them, like they might stay there for a little bit and see if people are okay”.

This is identified by one delivery partner as one of the main aims of the Beacon Project - to break down barriers between children and uniformed services - “Sometimes the uniform can be a barrier to children, or they see a badge and it’s a barrier. So, we like to break down and get face-to-face with the children - saying we’re here to help you, we’re in your community. And it’s not just the fire service, it’s about positive role models within the community, so the police, the ambulance service, youth workers”.

This change of opinion is shown for the police in a discussion in one focus group as one child recounts seeing “so many (police) at McDonalds once”, continuing to describe how they were “scared that my mum might get arrested”. When asked if they were scared anymore, they replied- “No because I know they’re only there to help, not there to arrest people that are innocent” (Child, FG2). This displays how the Beacon Course has helped to frame police in a positive light, that is hoped to in the long-term reduce antisocial and violent behaviour.

“I’ve always been scared of police and fire engines but now I like them.” (Child, FG2)

3.6.3 Developed Teamwork and Communication Skills

Teamwork, communication and working together are the three main strands that underpin all activities within the Beacon Project. This is reflected within the perceived learning from the students as they explained learning to “show respect, be patient and communication” (Child, FG3), because “teamwork makes the dream work” (Child, FG2).

“We learnt how to communicate better.” (Child, FG2)

“To help each other, like when you’re doing something. It’s basically like communication, but you’re helping each other when you need help.” (Child, FG5)

“I love learning how to communicate, how to transport in the dark (cage) through feeling. I’ve just loved the Beacon Course so much.” (Child, FG5)

The Smokehouse was cited as a key activity that enhanced participant’s communication and teamwork. One child stated that it was their favourite activity “because we learnt how to communicate” (Child, FG6). Another child explained how communication was used and developed during this activity - “When we were in the smokehouse whoever was at the front had to shuffle and sweep and say there’s a mattress here, step over it. So, then we could communicate and pass the message along to the back, so they’ll know if somethings there so it’s not alarming when you trip over it” (Child, FG5).

Through developing teamwork and communication skills, schools have reported a significant impact within the classroom. This is particularly surrounding tasks requiring students to work with others.

“... is displaying a more mature attitude. She appears to be more focused in class. She communicates better in group work better than she did before.”

“... is notably less competitive, therefore getting into less arguments with other children.”

“... gained a lot from the teamwork and communication element of the course. He’s displaying a more mature attitude and is less argumentative.” (School feedback, Course Summary, Secondary data)

This is further evidenced through evaluation data collected via MFRS pre- and post-course surveys that provide teacher assessments of each child’s communication skills, relationship with staff and relationship with others, and behaviour (See Appendix 1). This data revealed changes in the children’s communication skills which progressed from an average of 60.6% reported as good/excellent pre-course, compared to 87.0% post-course (pre mean, 2.70; post mean 3.17; $p < .0001$). In addition to this, teachers reported a change in relationships with staff, with 77.7% reported as having good/excellent communication pre-course, compared to 88.8% post-course (pre mean, 2.82; post mean 3.33; $p < .001$). Children’s good/excellent relationships with other students also increased pre-course (83.5%) to post course (98.1%) (pre mean, 2.7; post mean 3.31; $p < .0001$).



3.6.4 Changes in Sense of Achievement, Confidence and Aspirations

During the Beacon Project children were given the opportunity to learn new things in an engaging way. Delivery partners recognised that the Beacon Project works “better for those who are not very academic” because children are rarely given the opportunity to achieve and develop skills outside of the classroom “if it’s not in sport”. Therefore, the delivery partners aim “to build up their confidence in their teamwork” by concentrating “a lot on praise and acknowledging the small achievements”.

“Even though we do learn, we learn about maths, English, science, history and all stuff like that, instead of going out and doing activities.” (Child, FG1)

“You find, an child who is struggling in school and constantly being told off can actually be the most outstanding with those, because when it comes to teamwork and leadership, they’ve got them skills, but they don’t get many opportunities to do that in school. So, for them they feel like actually I’m achieving.” (Youth Advocate MFRS)

The sense of achievement in each child is shown throughout the focus groups as the majority of participants reported that they have learnt a great deal in terms of skills and knowledge about safety. Gaining a certificate at the end of the course was acknowledged as a massive achievement for some who feel like they have never achieved anything before.

“I’ve learnt a lot.” (Child, FG1)

“I hope I get a first aid certificate today, because my parents will be so proud of me for achieving something, because I never achieve anything.” (Child, FG2)

“I feel like I’ve done something good for other people.” (Child, FG2)

In addition to the perceived knowledge gained, individuals feel like they have developed their “confidence, resilience, teamwork and communication”

(Child, FG6). One child showed how the Smokehouse challenged them to push themselves - “We’ve learned how to challenge yourself, cause when we’re at the Smokehouse some people were scared to go in, then near the end we were all saying if you don’t do it now, you’ll regret not doing it. Then they ended up pushing themselves and did it. Then when they got out, they were buzzing (happy) that they went in” (Child, FG6). When the interviewer asked how they think that can help them in life, this child believed it would help them by “pushing yourself to keep going and keep working hard”.

The confidence gained throughout the course is perceived to have helped in school as one child reports how confidence has helped them in the classroom - “With people in school as well like with miss *** (teacher name) and in class with stuff where you need to be confident” (Child, FG6). This is further evidenced by secondary data from feedback sheets provided by both the parents of the child and the school. One parent stated that - “The school say he has been more focused in class. He says he feels happier in himself”. Additionally, the school have reported that one child’s “experience on the course has started discussions about different kind of jobs and the skills and qualities required. He is more confident and focused since doing the course”. This positive impact within the school is further evidenced by the Beacon evaluation data, completed by the schools to compare pre- and post-course data. Alongside the changes stated within the previous section, regarding improvements in communication, and staff and student relationships, this data has revealed improvements in behaviour and attendance (See Appendix 1). For behaviour, 56.9% of students were reported to have good/excellent behaviour pre-course, compared to 82.2% post-course (pre mean, 2.59; post mean

3.13; $p < .005$). In terms of attendance, 77.5% had 95% or 100% attendance pre-course compared to 85.2% post-course (pre mean, 3.00; post mean 3.30; $p < .005$).

By raising confidence and providing positive role models, the Beacon Project is about raising aspirations to prepare for the future and new situations - “showing them that there are positive role models out there, and you can aspire to be anything you want” (Delivery Partner, MFRS). Focus groups

“To be honest, it kind of pushed me to do more stuff, like if I’m scared of doing something, I’ll just be like I’m gonna do it. If I don’t do it then how am I supposed to see if it’s scary or not.” (Child, FG1)

displayed the significant impact of learning about resilience, which was continually cited as a main skill learnt. When asked how resilience will help them in life, one child gave an example of starting a new job- “When it’s your first day working at the Fire Station and you have to go into a house with fire, but then you have to push yourself to do it because if you want the job then you have to work for it” (Child, FG2).

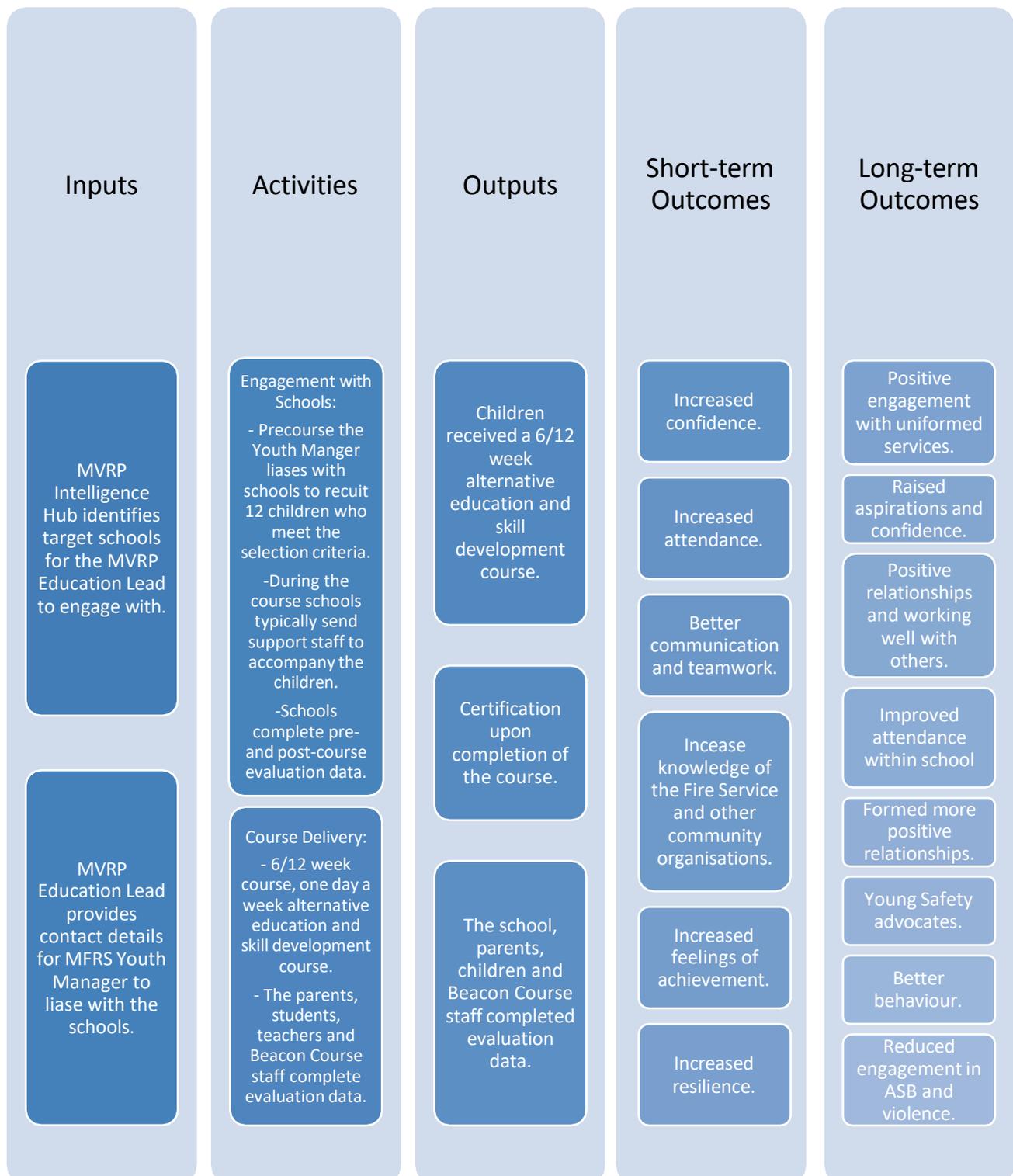
Overall, the Beacon Project has given the children aspirations to work towards a rewarding career. Some were inspired to pursue a career to help people - “I want to be both a firefighter and a doctor” (Child, FG6).

“The Beacon Project is a fantastic opportunity for our children. They have loved doing all the activities and are now talking about a future in the fire service, so this has raised their aspirations. They have been pushed out of their comfort zones and found they can achieve, so it really has raised their self-esteem.” (School Teacher, Secondary data)

4. Logic model

A logic model of the Beacon Project was developed based on the evaluation findings and is provided in Figure 1. This provides an overview of the inputs and resources needed to implement the programme, the activities which are implemented as part of Beacon Project, the outputs, and the anticipated short and long-term outcomes for children and the wider community.

Figure 1: Beacon Project logic model



5. Summary of key findings

As part of a range of activities to develop, promote and sustain a whole system public health approach to violence prevention, in 2021/22 the MVRP funded the Beacon Project. The Beacon Project is delivered by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and is designed as an alternative education and skill development course. The project offers a 6-week course for primary school children and a 12-week course for secondary school children, run one day a week during school term times. The project targets selected children, who meet the course criterion, engaging them in educational lessons and practical fire service activities to help them develop key skills that will keep them safe and empower them to make positive life choices. This report presented the findings from a process and outcome evaluation of the Beacon Project detailing programme implementation and impacts for children.

Delivery of the programme

The Beacon Course is an alternative form of education that gives children the opportunity to learn something new in an engaging way. The course lessons are unique as it delivers on a range of topics such as first aid, community safety awareness, road and water safety, and healthy relationships. In addition to this, the course also offers practical activities that are designed to develop resilience, confidence, teamwork and communication. The course can be adjusted based on the needs of the school/group or adapted based on relevant issues within the community. Between April and December 2021 MFRS delivered 12 Beacon Courses to 134 children.

The Beacon Project targets children who may benefit from outside of school activities to develop skills that will assist them through education, and engagement with school and the community. To implement the Beacon Project the MVRP Intelligence Hub selected (based on data on violence and underlying risk factors) and contacted the target schools; the responsibility of selecting the 12 students was then placed with the school. The partnership with the MVRP during this process has been cited as a key facilitator to programme implementation. Additionally, the Beacon Project staff perceive the partnerships developed with the school as a key facilitator; with MFRS being a reputable, statutory organisation, the schools can develop trusting relationships from the onset. This is vital in selecting students who will gain the most from the course, and with the implementation of each week; schools who send support staff allow for direct feedback and continued support for the children as praise and acknowledgement is extended to the school environment. Another key perceived facilitating factor to the success of the course has been the role of the delivery partners and their engagement with the students. Coming from an external agency, MFRS staff can reinforce positive messages and behaviours that teachers may have struggled with previously. This ability to engage with the children to form positive and trusting relationships is evidenced through the student's perceptions of the staff as "amazing" and their "friends". Youth who engage with trustworthy adults in the pursuit of developing skills are more likely to build the developmental assets needed for a positive future [2].

Beacon Project delivery partners commented on the nature of MVRP short-term funding as a barrier for project expansion. If the funding was for longer MFRS would be able to hire more staff and expand the project. Currently, the Youth Manger wishes to deliver four courses a week, instead of five. This is so the staff can have one day a week to revisit schools and further develop partnerships by offering, for example, whole school talks on fire safety. This is perceived as a key area for development and sustainability. To continue developing the Beacon Project the staff must continually update and

enhance the programme content, attend training, and remain adaptable to societal and community changes. The Beacon Project is sustainable in the unpredictable climate of COVID-19 as the Youth Manger states that they are prepared for face-to-face and online delivery.

Impact of the Beacon Project

Teachers and parents have been astounded by how much knowledge children have acquired from attending the Beacon Course. Children participating in focus groups displayed their knowledge about fire safety, hoax calls, road safety and first aid. It is hoped that this knowledge will be retained and have a significant impact throughout the child's life. However, the Beacon Project also aims to make these students young safety advocates within the community, sharing the lessons that they've learnt. This is shown throughout the focus groups as students report teaching first aid and safety information to their family and friends. This wider impact of the Beacon Project creates trusting relationships within the community, reinforcing positive behaviours whilst discouraging antisocial and violent actions in the students and consequently their peers. This is also done through reinforcing positive relationships with community services (e.g., the fire service, police or social workers) who may have misguided negative associations, or if there is a lack of knowledge about the organisation. Young people typically hold negative associations with the police when there are perceptions of unfair targeting and treatment [3]; these negative perceptions are typically shared by parents and children [4]. Overall, focus groups revealed a significant change of perception regarding community services, as primary school students reflected on the previous ambiguity surrounding the fire service and what they have learnt now. Children stated that they were previously scared of these services, but now, through the Beacon Course, they realise they're only there to help. The breaking down of barriers between youth and community services is significant as previous police and youth engagement interventions have revealed positive impacts on offending rates and wider benefits to the community [5].

One of the main learning outcomes cited from the children was the development of 'teamwork and communication' skills through practical activities. Through developing teamwork and communication schools have reported that students have improved when working with others, are more focused in class, and have been less argumentative. This is a significant impact of the Beacon Project that will benefit individuals throughout school and their life. Finally, the Beacon Project provided individuals with an opportunity to achieve outside of the usual academic setting. For those who may have seen themselves as never achieving anything before, receiving praise and certification has had a significant impact on these individuals. The children who participated in the course reported an increase in confidence as they challenged themselves throughout and developed resilience. Resilience in children is significant in violence prevention as it acts as a form of protection, allowing them to prevail over adversity to develop into stable, integrated, and socially responsible adults [6]. The positive impact of this is displayed in school as individuals are more focused and have raised aspirations to strive for a rewarding career, with some now wanting to be firefighters or doctors. Teacher reported evaluation data collected by Beacon course staff pre- and post-course revealed statistically significant improvements in behaviour, communication, relationships with staff and relationships with peers.

Conclusion

Emerging findings suggest a number of key learnings about the process and impacts of the Beacon Project. Overall, the primary and secondary Beacon Course offers a unique learning environment for children to learn about safety within the community whilst developing key skills through practical activities. This evaluation revealed a number of key facilitators for the project surrounding partnerships with the MVRP and schools. For the project to expand and increase its reach, more

secure, long-term funding is required to employ more staff and ensure partnerships with schools remain consistent. The outcomes of the Beacon Project are significant for the children and the wider community, as the skills developed and knowledge acquired allow them to become young safety advocates.

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7. Appendix

Table 1. Indicators of student behaviours within the school environment, pre- and post-course (Teacher reported assessments)

| | | Pre | | Pcst | |
|---|----------------------|-----|------|------|------|
| | | n | % | n | % |
| Attendance rate | 85% | 14 | 13.7 | 6 | 6.8 |
| | 90% | 9 | 8.8 | 7 | 8.0 |
| | 95% | 44 | 43.1 | 29 | 33.0 |
| | 100% | 35 | 34.3 | 46 | 52.3 |
| Behaviour | Challenging | 12 | 11.0 | 3 | 2.8 |
| | Requires Improvement | 35 | 32.1 | 16 | 15.0 |
| | Good | 48 | 44.0 | 52 | 48.6 |
| | Excellent | 14 | 12.8 | 36 | 33.6 |
| Communication | Really struggles | 4 | 3.7 | 0 | 0 |
| | Struggles | 39 | 35.8 | 14 | 13.0 |
| | Good | 52 | 47.7 | 62 | 57.4 |
| | Excellent | 14 | 12.8 | 32 | 29.6 |
| Relationship with staff | Withdrawn | 9 | 8.7 | 2 | 1.9 |
| | Shy | 14 | 13.6 | 10 | 9.3 |
| | Good | 67 | 65.0 | 46 | 43.0 |
| | Excellent | 13 | 12.6 | 49 | 45.8 |
| Relationship with other students | Withdrawn | 8 | 8.2 | 0 | 0 |
| | Shy | 8 | 8.2 | 2 | 1.9 |
| | Good | 70 | 72.2 | 68 | 65.4 |
| | Excellent | 11 | 11.3 | 34 | 32.7 |

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