

Evaluation of St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School Bereavement Intervention

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"All One and For All"

Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership Whole System Evaluation 2022/23
Supplementary Report 3



Liverpool
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1. Introduction

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 (Quigg et al, 2022) the Merseyside Academics' Violence Prevention Partnership (MAVPP) were commissioned to evaluate the MVRP whole system. As part of the 2022/23 evaluation, Community Safety Partnership leads from the five local authority areas in Merseyside nominated one MVRP funded intervention to be included as a case study in the whole system evaluation. This report presents an evaluation of St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School Bereavement Intervention.

1.1. Background

UK police data reported 6,645 offences involving firearms in England and Wales between 2022 and 2023, which was a 13 percent increase from the previous year (n=5,860) (ONS, 2023). In the North West of England, TIIG data shows that between July 2017 and June 2022 there were 644 gunshot/gunshot wound ambulance callouts. Areas with the highest number of gunshot related callouts in Merseyside were Liverpool, Sefton, and Knowsley (TIIG, 2022). Whilst there are a myriad of interventions, prevention strategies, and treatment options being delivered to those most at risk of harm from violence and associated behaviours, tragic incidents do still occur. In August 2022 there were four fatalities from gun and knife violence in Merseyside over a weeklong period (TIIG, 2022). One of the four fatalities was that of Olivia Pratt-Korbel who died on 22 August 2022 following a shooting by a masked gunman in Liverpool. The tragedy occurred at the doorstep of nine-year-old Olivia's family home in Dovecot. Olivia was a year four pupil at St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School in Knowsley. In response to this tragedy, MVRP funding via Knowsley Community Safety Partnership (CSP) was allocated to the school who had put a plan in place to support those affected including pupils and classmates of Olivia, school staff, and parents. Listening Ear and Altru Drama CIC were the first activities put in place.

1.2. Listening Ear

Listening Ear was established in Merseyside in 1993 by community volunteers whose ethos was that of a 'reflective listening' style of support. It received accredited status with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and in 2006 became a registered charity (Listening Ear, 2019). The service provides a range of therapeutic support for adults including mental health groups, friendship after bereavement groups, counselling for work-based mental health issues, and suicide prevention services. They provide services for children and young people who are facing traumatic loss and separation including 'Butterflies' which provides emotional support for families affected by bereavement and loss.

1.3. Altru Drama CIC

Altru Drama CIC are a non-profit, touring theatre company who work with schools, youth, and community groups in Liverpool and across the UK. They create and deliver drama workshops, performances, and projects which make a difference to people's lives by supporting learning, personal growth, and community cohesion (Altru, 2023). They use drama games and activities which are intended to help the participants to develop confidence in themselves, and to have a greater sense of

teamwork with the others involved. Topics explored include personal, health, and social issues. Altru Drama provide bespoke projects that are tailored to the specific needs of those who will be participating (Altru, 2023).

2. Methodology

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

Evaluation activities included:



Interviews ($n=4$) with key stakeholders involved in the implementation and delivery of the intervention.



Focus group with year five pupils of St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School aged 10 -11 years ($n=6$).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers ($n=3$) at St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School, and a stakeholder from Knowsley council ($n=1$). Interviews were conducted face-to-face and explored perceptions of the intervention and activities; implementation and delivery; perceived and actual impact, sustainability, and plans for the future. A focus group was conducted face-to-face with year five pupils of St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School ($n=6$) and explored the pupils experiences of the activities, impact, and recommendations for the future.

The gatekeeper (Service Manager for Crime and Communities, Knowsley council) facilitated contact between the researcher and school staff. Teachers at the school identified young people to take part in the focus group and sought parental consent. The focus group took place in a private room at the school and pupils were given a £10 voucher as a thank you for their time. All participants were provided with a participant information sheet and gave written consent. Ethical approval was granted by Liverpool John Moores University Research Ethics Committee (UREC ref no 23/PHI/003).

Interview data were transcribed verbatim and were imported into NVivo where they were coded and subsequently thematically analysed.

3. Key Findings

3.1. Implementation and delivery

Following the death of Olivia Pratt-Korbel on the 22nd of August 2022, staff at St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School where Olivia was a year four pupil, immediately began to take steps to decide what support needed to be put in place for the pupils, parents, and all staff at the school. Within a week a multi-agency meeting '*about managing an entire school of indirect victims*' was held to discuss what support could be put in place. Similarly, Merseyside Police enacted a '*gold response*' to the tragedy which was supported by the Home Office who agreed to financially support those who needed to recover. Merseyside VRP acknowledged that St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School should benefit from this funding, and so, VRP funding via Knowsley CSP was allocated to the school.

“The Home Office then agreed funding to support the area to recover...So my head of service was part of the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership who allocated the funding and quite quickly it was, you know, acknowledged that St Margaret Mary’s needed to be a beneficiary of the funding” (S4)

The first intervention was provided by Listening Ear counselling, who already had a presence within the school. Initially they provided support to staff before the new school year commenced. This support continued to be available to staff once the school term had begun. They then prioritised the pupils in Olivia’s class by providing both a group session and subsequent one-to-one support where they felt it was needed. This support was believed essential by academic staff who did not feel they were equipped to provide support at the level required following such a tragedy (*“it was offered to all children...because it’s not within a teacher’s gift to assess whether a child needs...person-centred counselling or bereavement counselling”* S4). Listening Ear provided support to all other pupils in the school and extended the support to parents. The six pupils in the focus group explained how Listening Ear activities were carried out and how this linked in with their feelings about the tragedy of Olivia’s death.

“Because they were already working with the school, Listening Ear came on board, and we created a plan... they came into the school building on the two inset days before we started. They were available to speak to staff if they needed it. Then they went in for the first week back. They did a session in every class, the very first class they went into was Olivia’s class, and then they moved around year five. And I think they went down to year three the next day and year four” (S2)

“At the start of the year, they [Listening Ear] came in and they just talked to us a bit on the first day and they took us out in groups, and they showed us a box and there’s a mirror in there. And they said when you open the box, you’ve got to tell me what the person inside is like. So, you have to describe yourself” (P5)

“We talked about like our feelings and stuff and the impact that it’s had on us and how we’ve handled it” (P3)

“[Counsellor name] helped us to express our feelings” (P1)

Alongside this counselling support, school staff also felt it was important to address the consequences of the behaviours and actions associated with Olivia’s death. Altru Drama CIC were commissioned to address this need with the pupils in year five. A practitioner from Altru Drama attended weekly to deliver sessions that focused on developing confidence, trust, and teamwork through the use of drama activities and games. The aim was to invoke thoughts around the choices people make, the consequences for those choices and how incidents of crime impact the community as a whole through drama workshops.

“They’ve done some beautiful pieces of work. They’ve got a theatre group coming into the school. They were going to do a [drama workshop]...basically around choices. So, this is what I was talking about like part of the long-term strategy around choices and you know, making good decisions for their friendship groups and...appropriate thought about not getting into criminality” (S4)

Pupils’ views of the activities provided by Altru Drama were very positive. The children enjoyed the dramatized learning around choices and consequences and being able to express themselves in a group setting.

“One group had people in a car where someone was drinking or driving, smoking with kids in the car, on the phone while you were driving. Yeah, driving and drinking, murder, kidnapping, stuff like that” (P1)

“And then I’ve lived and learned to do the right or wrong thing” (P4)

Finally, teachers at the school learned through school networks that the tragedy had affected three other schools in Knowsley and as a result came together to create a Community Spirit festival which was to be held on Olivia's birthday. Collectively, they *‘wanted Olivia's legacy to be something that was positive ... we wanted a message of positivity, and of hope really, and of community stronger together that's what we wanted to demonstrate’*. This would be carried out with St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School staff and pupils, parents, the community, and Olivia's mum and family.

“Olivia's mum was very much involved in that. So the first thing we did was we commissioned a survey that went out to every child in all the schools, and it went out to every parent as well ... And so it was things like, When you think about the community you live in, what words spring to mind? What is it you value about your community? Where are the places that you value in your community? And it was a lovely piece of work, and it came out with one of those wordles. That wordle was given to a poet called Curtis Watt” (S1)

As part of the festival, children, parents, and staff worked with dance instructors, a poet, and artists to deliver as host of events at the festival in remembrance of Olivia. The event was held in Court Hey Park who also commissioned a section of the park to be a memorial garden for Olivia. Several memorials were also created at the school (including a mural, an outdoor stage and book of remembrance). Pupils participating in the focus group were keen to take the researcher to see these memorials, suggesting they provided the pupils with a focus point for positive remembrance.

“They've commissioned a part of the Court Hey Park that's cordoned off and that is going to be a special memorial area for Olivia, Olivia's family. So, the four schools together are creating that...mum wanted...a Wizard of Oz theme because the last production she did with us. And she was into unicorns and stuff like that. So, she wanted it very much along the lines of the things that she was into.” (S1)

“And also on the day of the funeral we all drew these flowers and coloured them in ... there's a big garden, and it says Olivia's garden. And other flowers have moved onto the wall and then as a little poem for her and a picture on the wall (P2)

We had a mural painted for her with a quote from Matilda the musical, which is ‘even if you're little, you can do a lot’. We had a Unicorn painted with all rainbow around it (P5)

We also had like a big festival in Court Hey Park with pink clothes on (P6)

3.2. Impact

The impact of Listening Ear and Altru Drama was very positive. Teaching staff noted that the Listening Ear counsellors were able assess and assign pupils to support specific to their individual needs. This included a group for children experiencing heightened anxiety, a group for those who were friends of Olivia and one-to-one counselling. It was clear that the teaching staff were grateful for this support from skilled professionals, as the schools alone would not have been able to provide the same level of support to pupils, parents, and staff. The impact of Altru Drama was also powerful, and following the school's experience, stakeholders from Knowsley council were considering how it could be used across

the local authority area. (*“Our link advisor from Knowsley Council was so impressed with the Altru work that she wants to roll that out across Knowsley Council”*, S1)

“All 480 children benefited from that. Now from those talks that they did...because they're trained counsellors, they could work out which children in each class needed one-to-one support and which children needed support such as anxiety group, one group were the direct friendship group of Olivia Pratt-Korbell... Some children then went on to have group counselling” (S1)

“So I think that this group gave...this small group of children, that smaller space to talk about their own personal experience with Olivia, because they were close friends, with a trained counsellor and all the parents have said how the children felt that was beneficial to them just to do it in a relaxed [setting], not in a lesson with another 29 children who didn't know Olivia as well as them. But that little small group, given that that time, yeah, I think they have benefited from having it” (S2)

The six pupils in the focus group discussed their experiences of Listening Ear and Altru Drama activities, and how they had been positive for them. Pupil described being given the space to discuss how they were feeling (*“Because you get to talk about your feelings”*, P3), how the tragedy had impacted them process the grief they had experienced losing their friend. The non-formal, activity-based nature of the activities allowed pupils to learn messages about positive choices and violence prevention in an active and understandable way. Specific coping strategies were also discussed, for example one pupil described creating a memory jar with their counsellor which contained messages to make them feel better if they are ever feeling down.

“Because she's like, not here anymore. Like it's important that we remember her and like even if some of us didn't play with her it's a big thing losing someone in your class because you'll never see them again” (P5)

“It was really fun [Altru drama], but it also taught us some important messages. If they just told us some people might say like got bored with them constantly telling us so they might have just not listened, but the way she did it, she put it into fun ways that we could all understand it”. P5

“What made me better is we made a jar and one of our counsellors helped us, and she said you can create your messages and put them inside the jar so whenever like you feel down or whatever and you can get them out and just look at it” (P2)

Pupils also discussed the impact of having a shared grief with others in their class and how the Listening Ear and Altru Drama activities helped them understand that they were not going through the tragedy alone. Some noted that they were less scared or worried about another tragedy happening because of the support provided by Listening Ear.

“I think it helps to show that you don't need to be worried because it's okay now. There's loads of people who are feeling the same way. It's not just you” (P1)

“I felt really worried when I came back to school before we had all these things. I still feel a bit worried now but less worried, because sometimes if someone I know has been like out of the house for long time, I'm like, I'm scared that they've gotten hurt because mum went to town the other day on the weekend to get something fixed and she went out like 8 o'clock and she didn't come back till half 2” (P2)

The final part of the intervention was the Community Spirit Festival which was held on Olivia's birthday. Participants felt this had a wider impact on the local community, with stakeholders describing positive feedback from parents and an overall sense of the community coming together to recover.

"The community very much valued, we've had a lot of positive feedback verbally from parents, but also emails saying how well we have supported the school community during that time" (S1)

"There has been a lot of feedback from parents, a lot of parents who actually have said when I was on the gate 'how are you doing?' Which is lovely" (S4)

The film that was created and shown at the festival 'The True Power of People' was described by external stakeholders as conveying a strong violence prevention message, and Merseyside Police, who played a significant role within the Knowsley community at the time, had highlighted it as a beneficial tool to raise awareness of these issues across the Merseyside Community.

"It's one of the most powerful videos I think I have ever seen in terms of the message" (S4)

"Can we [Merseyside Police] please use that on our socials because she said that every police person in the force needs to see it. Every criminal needs to see it" (S1)

One of the pupils made a poignant statement about the impact the film could have for children and young people in the community which summarises the positive impact the different strands of the bereavement intervention had on both the pupils of the school and the wider community.

"I want people to know that there's still have people out there that could have dangerous things, who do dangerous things. The message they should take from it is that there is dangerous people out there, but there is things that can keep you safe. So, like coming together or helping people, that's a good thing. Because other things are bad things, and you should lean towards the good things instead of the bad things" (P5)

3.3. Sustainability & the Future

Looking into the future, both stakeholders and pupils felt that Olivia should be remembered every year: 'we'd like to have a pink day each year' (P4). Continuing this event was seen as an important opportunity for remembrance for pupils at the school as well as providing a positive legacy of violence prevention within the local community (*"that is a legacy that will carry on and...each year on pink day, potentially that film gets shown"*, S1). Staff felt it was particularly important that Olivia's mum and the pupils were actively consulted and involved in decisions regarding these memorial days going forward. Stakeholders noted that funding was needed to continue both the annual pink day and interventions such as Altru Drama and Listening Ear counselling. Teachers recognised the grief and trauma experienced by the pupils would have longer term impacts which could continue into young adulthood, and that the pupils would need continued support.

"I know that the impact of Olivia's murder and the fact that it wasn't just a moment in time, just passed. This is something that children are still struggling as they grow up to understand" (S4)

"I'm sure they had short term plans, medium term, and long-term plans. And I think they are very sensitive to Olivia's legacy and Olivia's family and her mum, and I know there's lots of consultation with her mum whenever they do work that relate to Olivia's murder,

which is fantastic. And then, you know, it's not just the school ploughing on and making decisions...[they] take consultation with the children, with Olivia's family" (S4)

"I think that, if possible, where there are future pockets of funding, that we should recognise that that school needs that continued support...it's not something that just happened, is it. You're not healed... you're not bereaved anymore" (S4)

Pupils participating in the focus group also recognised that they needed ongoing support. As illustrated in the quotes below, pupils' discussions highlighted that there would be longer term impacts for them including continuing fears about their safety and emotional impacts on their wellbeing, but that ongoing support and creating a positive legacy for Oliva could support them in responding to these fears.

"celebrate Olivia's birthday every year ... the way we celebrate stuff to remember her that's made me a little bit less scared" (P1)

"Maybe Listening Ear for more people in our class because some people are struggling really, really bad from the murder" (P1)

"If they think that they're not safe, they [Listening Ear] might help them just think that they really are" (P2)

4. Summary of Key Findings & Recommendations

The bereavement intervention put in place by St Margaret Mary's Catholic Junior School was established in response to the tragic death of Olivia Pratt-Korbelt who was a year four pupil at the school. Activities included counselling by Listening Ear, drama workshops delivered by Altru Drama CIC, and the development of a Pink Day and Community Spirit Festival in collaboration with local schools, Knowsley Council, and the wider community of Knowsley. This report presented the findings from a process and outcome evaluation of the intervention detailing programme implementation and impacts for the pupils, staff, and parents as well as the wider community.

Due to Merseyside Police's gold response to the tragedy, Merseyside VRP funding via Knowsley CSP was swiftly provided to the school so that the interventions could begin ready for the new school year. The funding was seen as a crucial first step in commissioning the relevant agencies such as Listening Ear and Altru Drama CIC. The support provided by Listening Ear and Altru Drama CIC was vital for pupils on their return to school in September 2022. It was noted that this support would be needed long-term for pupils who would experience enduring impacts from the grief and trauma experienced, especially those who were in Olivia's class. Funding streams should place high significance on the needs of the pupils, families, academic staff, and the wider community of Knowsley going forward and provide them with continued financial support.

A key strength of the intervention was that the activities were developed and designed in collaboration with the local community and based on their needs. The school initially identified and responded to the needs of their children, families, and staff by implementing the counselling and drama interventions. The school then developed memorials and murals for Olivia on the school grounds (including 'Olivia's Stage') and the memorial garden at Court Hey Park in collaboration with Olivia's family and the community. The school is urged to continue to tend to and make use of these through a children-led approach. Crucially, the position of the school within the community allowed them to identify broader needs within their neighbourhood, collaborating with local schools, organisations, and Olivia's family to develop the Community Spirit Festival and film. Participants described wider impacts on the local community from the film and festival by providing the

community with reassurance that the local authority, Merseyside Police and other statutory organisations were working to help them recover. Partners committed to reducing violence are urged to continue to support this initiative and to uphold the work that has been carried out in collaboration with Knowsley community as a whole.

4.1. Conclusion

The bereavement intervention at St Margaret Mary's primary school was put in place in response to the needs of pupils and families following a tragic incident of violence. There is evidence from this evaluation that implementation was effective and produced positive impacts for pupils, school staff, families, and the wider community. However, this evaluation also highlights that the grief and trauma experienced by pupils and the community will last longer term, and that ongoing support is vital to ensure sustained positive impacts for the local community. This report also highlights the effectiveness of designing community and child led responses to violence prevention following tragic incidents and the role that trusted local organisations (in this case the school) can play in facilitating community led responses. Collaboration between schools, council, Police, and the community of Knowsley to adopt a public health approach to violence and to support those affected by violent incidents is recommended.

The True Power of People

by Curtis Watts from the words of children at St Margaret Mary's, Malvern and Roby Park primary schools and the local community

They say there are powerful people on Earth:
The wealthy, the leaders, the famous
But what most don't know, is that those with true power
Are often forgotten and nameless
There are those who sit on the mighty chair,
The chair we call a throne
But the real leaders are those who care,
Whose power is all their own
The mightiest people of virtue
We're the innocent ones: the children
We've a freedom that has no curfew
So the elders say 'We must build them!'
We all have a voice and an abundance of choice
Our potential has no lack or limit
The value of laughter that drowns out the noise
Cannot be missed out or mimicked
As the elders have shoulders to stand on
And words of wisdom to heed
Some shoulders just need a hand on
And the home comforts that we all need
We play in the parks and we play in the streets
We play in our gardens and yards
With so many friends and so many to meet,
To us, making friends isn't hard
'Don't be a bad person' we children say

If you listen we will play our part
Because even those born today
Have wisdom from the very start
Community is of the people
Of the mind, the soul, the heart
So, treat each other well and be peaceful
Think about it: use your smarts!
Although you may have heavy burdens
As you grow up and grow old
You can be the change, for certain
And turn the lead into pure gold
We're one when we let go of fear
We're one when we all try our best
We're one when we're true and sincere
We're one when we all have respect
From the friends who run local chippies
To the friends who teach us at school
From office workers to hippies
To workies who work with their tools
Street sweepers, hairdressers, barbers and posties
The volunteers who give their time
The chefs in the carveries roasting our roasties
And those who protect us from crime
Life can be tough and fleeting
The physical won't last for ever
But our spirit will shine until the end of all time
So our souls will always live together
We could be family with no enemies
We'll never know if we don't try it
Let's say it together: 'All one and for all!'
It would be perfect – none could deny it!
Let's say it together: All one and for all!
Say it together 'All one and for all!'
Say it together 'All one and for all!'
And make sure we never deny it.

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