

The impact of the Voluntary Sector on Crime and Community Safety

A report for the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner

This is a presentation of evidence of the impact of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in tackling crime, reducing reoffending and improving community safety in the Northumbria Force Area. We do this to show the sector's importance in reducing crime and to demonstrate its track record in delivering effective services through grants and contracts. There are two parts to the evidence: this summary of impact; and a detailed evidence base which is a review of independent evaluations and project case studies, presented as an appendix.

Background

Voluntary and community organisations have long been involved in work to tackle crime, reduce reoffending and improve community safety. There are well known organisations like Victim Support and Women's Aid that support victims of crime, and the Depaul Trust and Centrepoint that help offenders turn away from a life of crime. But there are others, less well known who do important work: like NEPACS who run the prison visitor centres and carry out family support in prisons; HELIX Arts who use art as a means to rehabilitate offenders; and The Derwent Initiative who work to prevent sex offending. There are also others on the periphery of such work who nonetheless provide an important community safety function, such as Credit Unions, Age UK, Northumberland Community Development Network and the Disabled Forum. These engage with specific groups where crime and community safety are discussed and specific initiatives are introduced.

The VCS is a thriving and varied sector, made up of a range of organisations from small neighbourhood groups with little if any money and no staff, to multi million pound enterprises, but each play a part in making Northumbria a safer place to live. They have been important partners in Community Safety Partnerships, Probation Trusts and in the custodial estate. They have been an important ingredient to the mix of enforcement, diversion and prevention activities which provide effective crime reduction initiatives.

The VOLUNTARY SECTOR has delivered:
91% reduction in reoffending
72% reduction in appearances before Magistrates
52% of domestic violence victims reporting a complete cessation of all types of abuse
(taken from the appendix, pages 3, 5, 15)

The sector has specific qualities that make it unique and well placed to deliver community safety and tackle crime. These qualities include the ability to engage with the hardest to reach, being accessible, focused, trusted and committed. This is an important aspect about the sector; that they can access the most vulnerable people in society, vulnerable to being victims and perpetrators of crime, and who have nowhere else to turn for support.

Here, we present a summary of evidence of the impact of the VCS which has been independently verified through audit or evaluation or where impact has been demonstrated by case studies. The evidence is presented to demonstrate that the sector is commission-ready and able to demonstrate impact and outcomes. The services can be commissioned by project, unit (i.e. individual or family) and area. At the end of each section, we present examples of organisations that work in your area. These are not exhaustive but are meant as an indicator to more comprehensive lists which can be found online on the Safer Future Communities Network directory. The directory lists organisations and projects by Force Area and theme, e.g. anti-social behaviour and victim support.

Summary of impact

Alcohol and drug related crime

There are many ways in which voluntary sector organisations tackle the negative effects that alcohol and drug use have on individuals and communities. All of these support either the carer or user to abstain, control or manage the substance use. These services have led to reduced crime, improved community cohesion, significant cost savings and reduced pressure on local services. The initiatives are innovative, accessible and engaging, and have been shown to be effective on a number of levels, including:

- **Reducing harmful substance use:** there have been less admissions to hospital and less arrests made by the Police because the services result in people either stopping their substance use or reducing and engaging in less risky behaviour.
- **Positive effects on community cohesion:** the interventions improve the social fabric of local communities, through reducing public disorder and increasing the positive contributions that individuals can make – by stopping or reducing problem behaviour.
- **Reducing crime:** alcohol and drug use, particularly the former, are implicated in a number of crimes. By reducing substance use, people are less likely to engage in criminal behaviour. This is borne out by evaluations which indicate that because of the VCS services, people are involved in less crime.

Examples of organisations in Northumbria that address individual alcohol and drug use are:

Cyrenians

NECA

Escape Family Support

PROPS North East

Meadow Well Connected

- **Supporting victims:** agencies such as Victim Support have provided outreach services to victims who are often too frightened to leave their homes; increasing their confidence, working with the Police and reducing the fear of crime.
- **Mediating between injured parties and perpetrators:** often anti-social behaviour originates in poor communication, a lack of understanding and sometimes fear of difference. The VCS has provided neutral mediation to resolve both crisis situations and preventing problems becoming entrenched.
- **Providing diversion activities:** organisations have shown themselves to be very responsive to situations which can flare up, such as congregating youths drinking alcohol. The VCS quickly develops relationships with those at-risk of offending, involving them in positive activities.

Examples of organisations providing such services include:

Children's Society

Patchwork

Gallery Youth

Prince's Trust

Groundwork North East

Victim Support

Supporting victims of crime

Crime has massive effects on individuals and communities, increasing the fear of crime, reducing community cohesion and reducing liveability. The VCS has considerable expertise in supporting the victims of crime which contributes to countering all these negative impacts. Services to support the victim also directly contribute to a reduction in repeat victimisation. The very nature of the sector means that they are considered accessible, empathetic, non judgemental and supportive of victims of crime. Indeed, victims will often access a charity over other professional services. There are services for victims of a range of crimes, which include:

- Domestic violence including honour-based violence and forced marriage
- Sexual assault and rape
- Childhood sexual abuse
- Hate crime
- Homicide
- General crime categories, such as Violence Against the Person and Burglary.

In relation to local agencies providing support to a range of victim types, the most well known is Victim Support. More specialist agencies include the National Victims' Association who provide support to victims of homicide and others are listed in the following sections.

Anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour is often the scourge of communities, increasing the fear of crime, leading to community instability and social breakdown. Types and definitions of anti-social behaviour vary widely and range from harassment, noise, public disorder and neighbour disputes. There are also numerous approaches to tackle anti-social behaviour including mediation, youth diversion, surveillance and enforcement initiatives, with often a combination of all being most effective. The VCS has long been involved in tackling anti-social behaviour, working with both victims and perpetrators or those on the periphery, and both directly addressing problems or preventing them arising in the first place. The impacts of the sector include:

Violence against women and girls

This is an important sub-sector in victim support: services which include domestic, sexual and honour-based violence. The victims of such crimes require specialist support, which the voluntary sector is expert in providing. For example, many victims of domestic violence will not report crimes to the Police and want support for themselves rather than criminal action against the perpetrator. Support for victims of domestic and sexual violence is best provided through the independent women's voluntary sector and is done so in a way that cannot be replicated by the statutory services.

Examples of organisations in Northumbria that provide support for victims include:

Angelou Centre	National Victims' Association
Grace	Tyneside Rape Crisis
Sixty-Eighty-Thirty	Victim Support
Panah	Women's Health Advice Centre
Relate	Women's Health in South Tyneside



Reducing reoffending/prisoner resettlement

Most interventions contribute to a reduction in reoffending in individuals – whether this is through therapeutic support, such as counselling or through helping someone stop their problem drinking. Where evaluation has looked into these areas, there has been evidence to suggest that this has been the case. However, there are some projects which have been set up by the sector with a specific remit to try and reduce reoffending and most of these have worked with people in prison. Projects in the region have been shown to be effective in this area and have demonstrated impacts which include:

- **Reducing reoffending:** there is evidence to show that voluntary sector projects that offer wrap around support to people leaving custody have had quite remarkable impacts on reducing reoffending. Evaluations have shown that between 90 and 60 percent of ex-offenders using the projects have desisted from crime.
- **Engaging with those hardest to reach:** a key task of services is to build relationships with individuals who generally have antagonistic relations with agencies such as Police and Probation. The voluntary sector does this and works well at engaging offenders in constructive activities.
- **Improving lives:** evidence also shows that projects have helped ex-offenders turn their lives around, building self confidence, self esteem, employability and education levels. In other words, giving them the attention and support they need to become productive members of society.

Examples of voluntary sector organisations working in Northumbria on issues of hate crime are:

Better Days	Regional Refugee Forum North East
Vision Sense	Northumberland Disability and Deaf Network
Your Voice Counts	SpLinter Group West End Refugee Service

Examples of organisations and projects that deliver reducing reoffending projects include:

Aquila Way	Nacro
Depaul UK	NEPACS
Escape Family Support	Prince's Trust
Helix Arts	Wise Group

Breaking cycles of crime in families

Crime and anti-social behaviour often have their roots in difficult family situations: poor parenting, absence of boundaries, substance use and limited access to support can all greatly contribute to intergenerational cycles of crime. We have seen, since the Family Intervention Programmes of the previous administration, that often the most effective ways to stop crime is intervening in the lives of families, providing both support and challenge. CRAFT, a training programme for carers and parents of offenders has also been proven to be highly effective. In the North East we are fortunate to have voluntary sector agencies with strong and proven track records in CRAFT and family intervention. And although most areas have their own Troubled Family programmes, there are likely to be instances when additional services need to be commissioned.

Family interventions by the voluntary sector has led to outcomes which include:

- **Breaking the cycle of intergenerational crime:** Police Officers often say that they see certain families who, if they do not receive help, will produce the criminals of the future. They have also mapped family relations and offenders and have produced criminal family trees. Intervention in families has been demonstrated to break this cycle.
- **Reducing domestic violence:** by working with families, victims have more control and understanding of violence and abuse and are thus more able to control, manage or leave situations.
- **Reducing risk to children:** this is a key outcome and evidence has shown that because of interventions children are safer and at lower risk of serious harm.

Agencies with a track record in this area include:

Action for Children
Children North East

Escape Family Support
PROPS North East

- **Engaging with the hardest to reach:** this is a consistent theme with the voluntary sector - that they can meaningfully work with the 'hard cases', those that statutory services are often ready to abandon to custody. These services are trusted by young people and thus can provide meaningful activities to divert them from crime and engage them in discussions about the implications of their actions.
- **Increasing self confidence and self esteem:** crime and low confidence and self esteem are often connected. Building these areas within individuals is an important element in helping young people avoid peer pressure and prevent and divert them away from crime. The voluntary sector have demonstrated that this work helps young people feel better about themselves.
- **Improving the social fabric:** working with young people helps to make them feel included in local communities. Organisations working with young people often provide a brokering role between them and other community members, increasing understanding of both groups. This work helps young people ultimately feel part of their local community and therefore less likely to cause damage.

Organisations working with young people around crime and disorder include:

Centrepoint

Nacro

Depaul UK

Prince's Trust

Hirst Welfare

YMCA

What next?

To find organisations working across Northumbria, look on the Safer Future Community Network directory, where you can search by area and theme.

[www.vonne.org.uk/policy/criminaljustice/
saferfuturecommunities/directory/](http://www.vonne.org.uk/policy/criminaljustice/saferfuturecommunities/directory/)

If you would like to know more about the Safer Future Communities Network in Northumbria, please contact: VONNE

Web: www.vonne.org.uk

Tel: 0191 2332000

Email: vonne@vonne.org.uk



Safer Future Communities Networks have been developed in each Police Force Area to help the sector to engage with and influence the Police and Crime Commissioners. These networks are funded by the Home Office through CLINKS (www.clinks.org).