

Teachable moments focused deterrence car (FDC) – West Yorkshire Police

Using teachable moments theory to respond to violent incidents in West Yorkshire.

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Key details

Topic	Violence including homicide
Organisation	West Yorkshire Police
Target group	General public

Smarter practice

Overview

The teachable moments focused deterrence car (FDC) is a Home Office funded initiative intended to reduce violent incidents in West Yorkshire. It was launched in 2021.

The FDC is an unmarked car crewed by a plain-clothes officer and a youth worker, which attends the scene of a violent incident after the initial police response ends. It identifies and engages with young people who are at risk of committing violent crime or becoming victims of violent crime. This:

- fills the information vacuum often left after a serious incident or enforcement operation
- provides an opportunity for members of the public and those who have witnessed the incident to reflect on the event

The FDC engages with those in the vicinity and the wider community to give accurate information and identify those who might be at risk of becoming involved in or a victim of crime. Where appropriate, the youth worker signposts or refers the young person to relevant services or activities in the community.

This intervention is intended to mitigate any risk identified and provide the individual with a positive alternative pathway towards healthier outcomes. The initiative is based on reachable or teachable moment theory. This suggests there's a period after an incident has occurred when an individual is more open and willing to make changes in their life.

The FDC aims to impact the three key Home Office measures around reducing serious violence.

- A reduction in hospital admissions for assault with a knife or sharp object – especially among victims aged under 25.
- A reduction in knife-enabled serious violence – especially among victims aged under 25.
- A reduction in all non-domestic homicides – especially among victims aged under 25 involving knives.

As of February 2022, the initiative has successfully engaged 1,711 young people. Over the same period there has been a reduction in figures relating to the Home Office key serious violent crime indicators. West Yorkshire has seen additional benefits associated with collaborative working between the police and youth services.

Problem

Rise in serious violent crime

Before 2019 and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, West Yorkshire had witnessed a rise in serious violent crime, knife crime and homicide.

In early 2020, approximately 40% of homicide cases in West Yorkshire involved at least one individual aged under 25 – either as a suspect, victim or both. The most common age in such youth violence was 19 for both suspects and victims.

New young offenders

There was also a rise in young people involved in serious violence who had little or no offending behaviour and who the police were not previously aware of. Analysis of these young people often identified links to gangs in the form of peer groups or organised criminality (often street-level drug dealing).

Unwillingness to engage with police

Finally, there was an increasing number of victims and witnesses who were unwilling to engage with the police. These individuals had often been witnesses to previous serious violence events but not engaged with the police or other agencies.

Response

West Yorkshire Police collaborated with the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) to identify possible solutions with a national scanning exercise. This identified the teachable moments theory, which is already successfully used in the [A&E navigator](#) and custody diversion models.

About teachable and reachable moments

‘Teachable moments’ is an approach to behavioural change. It makes use of the time period after an incident where an individual is more open and willing to make changes, to provide direction and learning. A ‘reachable moment’ refers to an opportunity to engage with a hard-to-reach individual.

Advantages

A review of evidence suggests that the advantages of this approach are due to the following.

- Timing – it provides the opportunity to engage with individuals at the right time.
- Early identification – it allows intervention with those at risk before they commit or become further embedded in crime and the criminal justice system.
- Multi-agency partnership – it facilitates the collaboration and sharing of information, services and skills between different agencies.
- Voluntary involvement – engagement is optional. Young people are not forced to comply with services to address their risk factors.
- Referral pathways – having connections to a range of services helps ensure the most appropriate support is offered to the individual in need.
- Relationship building – when a referral is made, it provides the opportunity for long-term support for young people. This allows them to build trusting relationships with their support and youth worker.

Aims of the focused deterrence car

West Yorkshire Police and the VRU designed the teachable moments FDC. This aims to do the following.

- Identify and reach young people in the local community who are at risk of – or have an existing history of – committing crime or anti-social behaviour.
- Provide a reachable moment – where police officers and youth workers can engage with young individuals who may benefit from additional support when they are likely to be most responsive to it.
- Increase information and intelligence, to better understand unknown risk.
- Address the gap in service provision around the early identification and intervention of vulnerable young people who have not yet been identified by other agencies or services.
- Provide individuals with the community narrative after a serious incident or a proactive operation has taken place.
- Build relationships with young people and break down barriers by upskilling officers in communicating and working with young people.
- Provide effective enforcement and clearly communicate to young people what behaviours are not acceptable and what the consequences of those behaviours will be.

Logic model

Problem

- Increasing levels of youth violence, including homicide.
- Rapid increase in offenders with no previous significant offending behaviour.
- Young people not reporting crime and not being witnesses in criminal justice processes.

Response

FDCs across each district. The FDC is an unmarked vehicle deployed with a plain-clothed police officer and a youth worker. This initiative involves the following.

- Primary deployment. This is in the aftermath of an incident, to identify and engage with vulnerable young people in the community who were involved in or saw the incident.
- Proactive policing operations. These are locality based. This includes visiting areas that have previously been subject to serious incidents such as a homicide, or are hot spots for anti-social behaviour or serious violent crime where young people are known to gather. This also includes proactive visits to the home addresses of people who have been identified by a primary deployment.

The officer and youth worker signpost and refer these identified young people to relevant services or activities in the community. This helps to mitigate any identified risk. The FDC also offers young people immediate outreach and information about the consequences of crime, acting as the voice of the community.

Outputs

- Number of young individuals engaged with the FDC.
- Number of young people who have been referred on to community links.
- Number of young people signposted to local services.
- Number of people supported.
- Increased information and intelligence, allowing better understating of young people at risk.
- Reduced incident demands in hot spot areas attended by the FDC.
- Increased number of young people willing to be part of a criminal justice process when a victim or witness.
- Building a positive and informed community narrative in the aftermath of serious violence incidents, to deter further violence.
- Provide the young person with the consequences of their behaviour at the reachable moment.

Intended outcomes

- Engage with young people who are at the risk of committing or becoming victims of crime, and provide these individuals with a positive alternative pathway towards healthier outcomes.
- Increased partnership approach to serious violence and homicide prevention, supporting a trauma-informed approach.
- Upskill officers in communicating and engaging with young people, building a positive police experience.
- Improved community satisfaction and trust in policing.
- Reduction in violent offending and reoffending among young people.

- [View the logic model as a poster](#)

Implementation

Initial concept and funding

The initial concept for the FDC was designed in collaboration with West Yorkshire VRU.

Funding of £500,000 was secured through a successful Home Office youth innovation fund for the first year, with further funding provided by the VRU for the second and third years. There was a data and evaluation requirement to monitor and share findings with the Home Office throughout implementation.

The initial £500,000 was split, with:

- 20% funding police overtime costs
- 80% allocated across the five local authorities to provide youth outreach workers and support extra support provision

The FDC model is maturing and aims to be sustainable. Some of the costs are therefore starting to be absorbed into existing budgets and provision. For example, West Yorkshire Police are moving some of the police overtime cost into police officers' duty time and including the youth outreach cost as part of mainstream budgets and operating models.

Operationalising and logistics

Operational delivery of the FDC was locally arranged between police and partners, including which days of the week and what times to operate.

The model was based on an eight-hour police shift, with most deployments starting between 2pm and 4pm and finishing between 10pm and midnight. The flexibility accommodated for local differences in crime problems and availability of local services. Moreover, the vehicle was provided by either the police or youth provision depending on the local arrangement.

The start of the deployment would involve the police officer and youth worker meeting at a location to introduce, brief and set the parameters of the deployment. This setting of parameters would happen if either had specific tasking, areas of concern or revisits they wanted to include in the shift. This became more effective as relationships between officers and youth workers developed.

How the teachable moments FDC works in practice

The teachable moments FDC involves three stages.

1. Identify.
2. Engage.
3. Refer.

Diagram showing the three phases of the teachable moments focused deterrence car – identify, engage, refer

1. Identifying young people

There are two deployment methods. These are:

- primary deployment (responsive engagement)
- secondary deployment (proactive engagement)

The primary deployment method involves responsive engagement in line with teachable moments theory.

- Live-time incidents and information from the FCR are monitored to identify serious violence incidents.
- The FDC then responds to these.
- The officer liaises with the attending officers to establish a suitable time for attendance once the initial police management and investigation has taken place.

Secondary deployments or proactive engagement refers to actions being deployed while waiting for a primary deployment to take place. This could involve:

- identifying key hot spot areas to deploy to through intelligence searches
- attendance at locations or to individuals previously identified via other activity
- deployment to support enforcement activity such as stop and search and Section 60

2. Engagement

When the FDC attends a location in a primary deployment, the police officer informs the youth worker of the nature of the incident. They also provide information relevant to engaging with people at the scene and in the community, while being mindful of any ongoing criminal investigations.

Once at the location the youth worker – as the trained professional with existing community relations – is often the best person to begin speaking to those at the scene.

The length of the engagement depends on the circumstances of the incident and individuals involved. This might be a quick conversation with the young person to reflect on the incident and understand any risk factors, such as:

- involvement in crime
- missing episodes
- drug misuse
- gang associations (known or implied)
- home and education situation
- visibility to other organisations
- any protective factors

This ensures the FDC has the information required to check systems and decide on any wider referrals.

Alternatively, the circumstances might lead to a longer discussion. This could involve informing individuals of the consequences that may take place if certain behaviour continues. Consequences could include increased organisational surveillance via police or other agencies if anti-social behaviour continues or escalates.

At the end of the deployment the police officer and youth worker do a debrief. This ensures that everything was captured that needed to be and information was shared via existing organisational structures.

3. Refer and signpost

Intelligence is submitted through police intelligence systems after engagement has taken place, and if appropriate to do so.

If there are significant concerns about a young person, the police officer enters a child-at-risk referral through police safeguarding arrangements. The youth worker may also refer the same person through their own local processes.

At the time of the engagement, the FDC may also signpost young people to other support services, ensuring that the individuals have the details to contact them. Where individuals are signposted to relevant organisations or services, the responsibility is ultimately with the individual to approach these and seek support.

The police or youth worker can refer the young person to other alternative services. This may involve the youth worker organising an appointment for the young person or making an introduction to services. This approach has demonstrated significantly more success in terms of take-up and long-term support.

The FDC is supported by VRU-funded community links. These support existing place-based specialists – including statutory and third sector partners – to provide additional and ongoing support to young people who have been referred through the FDC programme. This is done through agreed pathways that are clear, consistent and personalised to the needs of individual young people, while commissioning any additional resource required for these services.

Enablers for implementation

- A reliable flow of intelligence through police logs and police radio to inform the officer and youth worker about which incidents to attend.
- Availability of a range of diversionary activities and services that support the individual's needs – it is crucial there is an existing community links programme in each district. While there is consistency in statutory services on offer – such as youth offending services – the delivery context may differ across districts.
- Youth services with a strong physical presence in the community to aid signposting.
- Youth workers with strong existing relationships with the police and other support agencies. It's important that youth workers are reassured that working in collaboration with the police will not impair their reputation with the young people in the community.
- Having the 'right' police officer. This refers to someone who understands youth work and has worked in neighbourhood policing.

Barriers to implementation

- A shortage of officers signing up for overtime, resulting in less police involvement with early help provision.
- In some districts there is a lack of diversionary activities and support services to refer young people to.
- Lack of awareness of the local available opportunities for those involved with the delivery of the FDC.
- There is a lack of lower level interventions and services available for those that would benefit from additional support but who do not meet the criteria set by some services, particularly statutory services. These criteria are often linked to known risks and are not always suited to early intervention and prevention.

Outcomes and impact

Challenges of analysing the impact

Analysing the impact of this intervention is difficult as it is not possible to map out what would have happened if this intervention did not take place. Although there is a system in place to measure the number of engagements and referrals, districts differ in how they record this data.

Independent evaluation

An independent evaluation was carried out in 2022 to 2023 by Wavehill, a social and economic research company. The evaluation involved interviews with youth workers, police officers, their managers and district leads as well as observational site visits and analysis of programme monitoring data. It found the following.

- According to interviewees, one of the primary direct impacts of the project includes how police become more embedded in youth justice and prevention at a community level. The evaluation suggests that by creating new connections with local youth groups, businesses and residents, the FDC project team may have built up trust in criminal and youth justice systems. This may result in young people feeling more confident that they can access social support through the FDC service, while residents may feel more protected after seeing the project team on the streets. Such an increase in feelings of safety and support could in part contribute to the Home Office outcomes around knife crime. For example, as individuals feel less fearful in their community, they may be less likely to carry a weapon. This notion appears to be reinforced by the fact that young people reported that they were less likely to engage in risky or violent behaviour following contact. This suggests that they now feel safe enough in their community to avoid resorting to violence.
- Interviewees also highlighted how the project extends the reach of youth services to vulnerable young people who might otherwise have gone unacknowledged or without support. This notion is reinforced by the fact that most young people engaged with via the FDC were not known to services before this contact. As such, the programme can be said to be effectively increasing knowledge of services.
- This also enabled police staff to access intelligence gathered by the community links services, facilitating understanding of hotspots of youth activity and instances of anti-social behaviour. Community-based intelligence such as this appears to have significantly informed which locations would be covered during FDC shifts, and at what times.

Impact as of February 2022

- 1,711 young people have engaged with the FDC.
- 138 young people have been referred to community links.
- A further 31 individuals have been signposted to local services and activities in the community.
- It's not known how many individuals were provided with long-term support.

Cost benefit analysis

A cost-benefit analysis was completed as part of the original evaluation 2022-2022 by Wavehill. It found that for every person who engages with community links and avoids getting involved in a violent offence, there is an estimated cost avoidance of:

- £7,196 for A&E treatment for a stabbing victim
- £10,307 for A&E treatment for a firearm victim
- £84 for counselling per victim with an injury
- £9,840 for depression caused by association and effect of crime
- £26,670 for anxiety/panic attack caused by association and effect of crime
- £14,050 for the criminal justice system dealing with violence resulting in injury
- £5,930 for the criminal justice system dealing with violence without injury

Force crime figures

The following table shows West Yorkshire crime figures relating to the Home Office key serious violent crime indicators for June 2022 to July 2023, compared with June 2021 to July 2022.

Crime or incident	Percentage decrease	Reduction in number of victims
Homicides	21%	4
Knife crime	2.6%	62
Section 18 assaults	11%	58
Hospital admissions	20%	30

Impact of collaborative working

The evaluation found that both youth workers and police officers feel this collaboration has improved relations between the police and public. The report highlights how important this is to the overall aims of the intervention, as poor relations between the public and the police are associated with an increase in violence. Specifically, youth workers highlighted the improved sharing of live intelligence as a key benefit of collaboration.

This improved intelligence-sharing also benefits the police with additional information facilitating the prevention and solving of crime.

Police officers have also profited from the ability to observe and learn from how youth workers interact with young people. This aids the attempt to improve their reputation and relationship with members of the public.

Learning and recommendations

Hours of operation

Analysis has revealed that most interactions (90%) take place between 4pm and 9pm. This suggests that operation hours should centre around this time to ensure maximum reach and efficiency of the intervention.

There is a benefit in shifts that operate early in the day. These provide the opportunity to engage with young people at school, which is a favourable place for the intervention to occur.

Seasonality of operation

Consultees also suggest there is a reduced number of young people on the street during the winter months.

Timings of interaction

Engagement needs to occur long enough after the incident for the immediate emotional response to pass, so that individuals can reflect properly and be more receptive to engaging with support. While it's important for the first encounter to be within the reachable moment time period, it's crucial to remember that these young people might have just suffered their own trauma or adverse experience. Just after the event they are likely to be experiencing heightened levels of emotion. In some cases, a follow-up at the home address the following day can be beneficial.

Location of interaction

Engagement in the young person's home resulted in a higher proportion of referrals than when the engagement occurred in the street. The home provides officers the opportunity to assess their living environment and talk to the young person's carer or family. More data is needed about where the interaction took place for a comprehensive understanding of the effect of location.

Type of incidents attended

There is a benefit of FDCs responding to missing people incidents, as it has provided officers the opportunity to gain intelligence on the underlying causes of an individual going missing.

Importance of partnership and collaboration

It's crucial that the FDC makes use of existing community links rather than working in isolation. Further engagement with wider stakeholders may improve the irregular flow of information. This currently means a lack of appropriate incidents for the FDC to attend and a less effective proactive engagement.

Importance of reflection and monitoring

It has proved useful for officers to provide feedback by monitoring returns. Key themes of feedback included the following.

- Officers reporting an improved understanding of the partnership landscape and opportunities to direct young people to alternatives other than criminal justice outcomes.
- Working with youth workers with lived experience taught officers how to engage and speak with young people from different communities and backgrounds. This learning has helped to de-escalate situations and build better relationships. This learning has since been shared with other police officers and the local neighbourhood policing team.
- The feedback from officers helped support and shape future deployments. This included building the intelligence picture around young people at risk, areas in which to deploy, and ideas beyond the original concept (for example, deployment to return missing persons incidents as a teachable moment).
- There was feedback on what didn't work. For example, trying to engage too soon in front of peers, engaging during bad weather (reduced opportunity), seasonal advantages and disadvantages, uniform and marked cars creating barriers, and working after 10pm (reduced opportunity).

Scope of the intervention

This initiative was delivered and implemented within a very tight timescale. This meant it was not possible to fully scope out the intervention to research where the demand would be and to push awareness of the intervention with wider stakeholders. Although the implementation has been successful, it was an ambitious undertaking.

Recommendations

Define hours of operation

Construct shift patterns in response to demand intelligence to achieve maximum engagement, instead of responding to practicality considerations.

Focus on responsive over proactive engagement

Reduce proactive patrolling of hotspots to focus on responsive engagement. This reflects the focus on quality over quantity.

Identify the gaps in support services

This ensures measures can be put in place to overcome this and increase the efficacy of the intervention.

Promote consistency of officers deployed on FDC

This could be done by linking to professional development and career progression plans to encourage officers to take on this role, as well as by investing in improving working relationships.

Seek feedback and monitor

Forces should provide the opportunity for officers from different districts to meet virtually to discuss their experiences and share some challenges and successes they have encountered.

Standardise data collection, recording and analysis

This should be consistent across districts to aid evaluation. There is the need for additional data about young people's engagement and progress in mitigating their risk factors. This will allow a deeper understanding of the impact of this intervention.

Embed the elements of focused deterrence in the model

It's important to combine this activity with mobilising community voices against crime and ensuring this is fed back to young people. This will develop the model further and embrace the learning from focused deterrence theories.

It's equally important to enforce sanctions for those who are unwilling to engage. They should be informed that tactics such as increased police and partnership surveillance (increased patrols, stops, social worker visits, education focus) will be used to support them away from risky behaviour that is illegal or might lead to crime.

Establish wider information sharing networks

The opportunity to share knowledge between youth work staff and police can:

- inform delivery of the intervention
- increase understanding of how best to interact with young people
- provide appropriate support relevant to young people's needs

College considerations

We strongly encourage forces to:

- complete equality impact assessments before implementation
- consider any adverse impacts and how these can be mitigated

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Tags

Homicide Gangs and youth violence Response policing