



**West Midlands**  
Combined Authority

## Wellbeing Board Meeting

<b>Date</b>	18th January 2019
<b>Report title</b>	Youth Justice – Childhood Adversity: ALTAR™
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**Recommendation(s) for action or decision:**

**The Wellbeing Board is recommended to:**

1. Note progress.
2. Consider a member lead within the Wellbeing Board to support the wider link to local wellbeing boards
3. Agree to receive a further report at the April Board prior to the publication of the final results.

## **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 To note the ongoing research into childhood adversity and the ALTAR™ framework (Abuse, Loss, Trauma, Attachment and Resilience) and note the emerging findings from the research.
- 1.2 To agree to consider the findings and implications in full following finalisation of the research at the Board after April 2019.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The WMCA Public Service Reform agenda was tasked to consider the reform of Youth Justice Services in the West Midlands. Messaging in the youth justice sphere is that although the current youth justice system has been incredibly effective at reducing the numbers of children in the criminal justice (first time entrants, youth reoffending and the numbers of children in custody), those remaining in the system are the most challenging and complex children. Upon commencement of the project there was no identifiable evidence, from the UK or elsewhere which specified what those challenges or complexities are.
- 2.2 In the autumn of 2017 the WMCA commissioned Dr Alex Chard to facilitate a programme of research to be undertaken by the West Midlands Youth Offending Team's (YOT's) into the extent of abuse, loss, trauma and attachment issues in a sample of YOT caseloads. The research was informed by the findings of a thematic review (Troubled Lives Tragic Consequences) undertaken by Dr Alex Chard in Tower Hamlets. The methodology was then further developed for application across the West Midlands region.
- 2.3 The Youth Justice Reform programme is overseen by a Youth Justice Reform Steering group which reports into the Public Service Reform Board.

## **3. Research Methodology**

- 3.1 An action research approach was adopted as it can both generate information on the profile of young people who are provided services by YOT's as well as developing the skills and knowledge of staff. The approach has also improved the knowledge of the lives of the young people being studied and assessments of their needs, as well as improving the understanding of the risks they may present. In addition, it has provided a catalyst for both practice based and strategic service development. The action research approach has also enabled the creation of the underlying conditions for future change. This is now being evidenced.

- 3.2 The original programme commenced in December 2017, this was for five cases from each one of the seven constituent authority member YOTs, a total of thirty-five cases. Each of the YOTs would research a stratified cohort of five cases covering custody, community penalties and early entrants. The sample was to be demographically representative in terms of ethnicity and gender. Different staff members would each provide information on a single case already known to them.
- 3.3 Following the initiation of the research by the WMCA, the research received additional funding through the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for the West Midlands which supported research into the cases of young people involved with gangs. Local Crime and Disorder Partnerships have also used PCC funding and supported two YOS's (Sandwell and Walsall) to enable all case holding staff to participate. In addition invitations to self fund were made to the non constituent authorities and the West Mercia Youth Offending Service has funded research into a cohort of cases (The West Mercia YOS area comprises of, Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Local Authorities). The research has also recently commenced a pilot with the West Midlands Police Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU) to include a small sample of young people known to them. The work has been informed by a previous study undertaken in Warwickshire that researched cases through an ALTAR™ informed lens which will be included in the overall analysis. The research now includes nearly 100 cases from across twelve local authorities.
- 3.4 In brief, each YOT staff member is using available case information to complete a quantitative risk matrix and a qualitative case storyline both of which are designed to elicit information related to abuse, loss, trauma and attachment. The staff involved in the programme, have undertaken a developmental programme. This covers the underlying thinking and research informing the programme, ensuring a similar level of understanding of the factors being researched.
- 3.5 The ALTAR™ (Abuse, Loss, Trauma, Attachment, Resilience) framework is predicated on an understanding that risk of harm and risk of offending and in particular serious offending has to be understood within the overall context of a child's life and not simply be based upon immediately identifiable risk factors. It builds upon existing research, having synergy with the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) model and places it within a youth justice context.
- 3.6 Risk and vulnerability within the youth justice population must be seen to be cumulative and understood to be more like a video than a snapshot. The ALTAR™ framework sees risk in the context of the child's life experiences, recognising that risk is also located in the experiences of families and that both trauma and risk can be conceived as being inter-generationally linked.

## 4. Emerging Findings

- 4.1 The research is ongoing and the results are yet to go through a formal validation process. At this stage the emerging findings are subject to ratification and should be interpreted in this context.
- 4.2 The initial findings suggest that childhood adversity in the West Midlands is wider than the well know Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) factors, in addition to the 10 traditional ACE factors, our research evidences that many children in the youth justice system in the West Midlands witness street or gang violence, some have transitioned here from countries known for genocide, some have been criminally or sexually exploited – or on occasions both. Some are parents themselves or have experienced the loss and trauma of a termination. Children in this sample had experienced significant abuse; there were more children who had experienced 3 or more types of child abuse than those who had experienced none in our study, and in many cases the abuse was extremely violent. The sheer volume of school exclusions, disengagement and disenfranchisement from the education system was overwhelming, children had been excluded from primary schools, and others had been to over 10 secondary schools, and poverty is higher in this group than in our general population.
- 4.3 Of the cases analysed to date,
- Just under two-thirds of them had experienced living in poverty or debt.
  - Over half of the children in the sample were eligible for free school meals. *DfE figures show that 14% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, indicating a fourfold over-representation for this group.*
  - Less than one in ten of these children were living with both their parents. *For those aged 12-16 the percentage living with both birth parents in the UK was 56%, for low income households this was 35%..*
  - Around one in six of these children were either parents themselves or had been through a termination.
  - Around a quarter were confirmed as having self-harmed, attempted suicide or had suicidal ideation.
  - Nearly two thirds had been reported as going missing.
  - Just over 10% were regularly attending a mainstream school.
  - Around 80% had attended two or more secondary schools.
  - Two in every three had been referred to CAMHS and there were issues of engagement for those who were seen.
  - A parent of nearly a third of the children had a current diagnosed or suspected mental health issue, an additional one in six children had a parent with a previous diagnosed or suspected mental health issue.

- Early onset behaviour issues were confirmed in a third of all cases and suspected in a further 20%.
- Just under half have been (or are currently) looked after children.
- Most of the children in the sample were known to children's social care.

## **5. Next Steps**

5.1 The UN convention of the rights of the child states;

*Children who have been neglected, abused or exploited should receive special help to physically and psychologically recover and reintegrate into society. Particular attention should be paid to restoring the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.*

5.2 The ambition is that we will not only meet the UNCRC requirement to provide special help to children who have suffered childhood adversity but we will do so as a community with love and humanity. YOT's in the West Midlands are working within current assessment frameworks to explore wider childhood adversities, they are flexing national standard expectations and trailing new ways of working. This includes purchasing 'a brain' and resources relating to neuropsychology, brain development and trauma informed practice, translating practice into arts based therapeutic services and using sport as an intervention. This has evidenced a reduction in breach and reoffending rates and for one area a new approach to girls in the criminal justice system.

5.3 This research, a strategic needs assessment which has already been undertaken and a policy options analysis will be presented to the Youth Justice Reform steering group in April 2019 with recommendations for the reform of the Youth Justice system in the West Midlands. This could include options for devolution as well as collaboration.

## **6. Financial implications**

6.1 The financial implications of the reform programme would be identified at a later stage. The cost of the research has been met by the WMCA and a number of partner agency contributions.

## **7. Legal implications**

7.1 The legal implications of the reform to youth justice will be considered in light of the specific proposals.

## **8. Equalities implications**

8.1 There is a known overrepresentation of Black and Minority Ethnic groups within the Criminal Justice system. This research also suggests an over representation of

children who live in poverty and those who are looked after. These will all need to be considered in the final proposals and any future reform options.

**9. Other implications**

**10. Schedule of background papers**