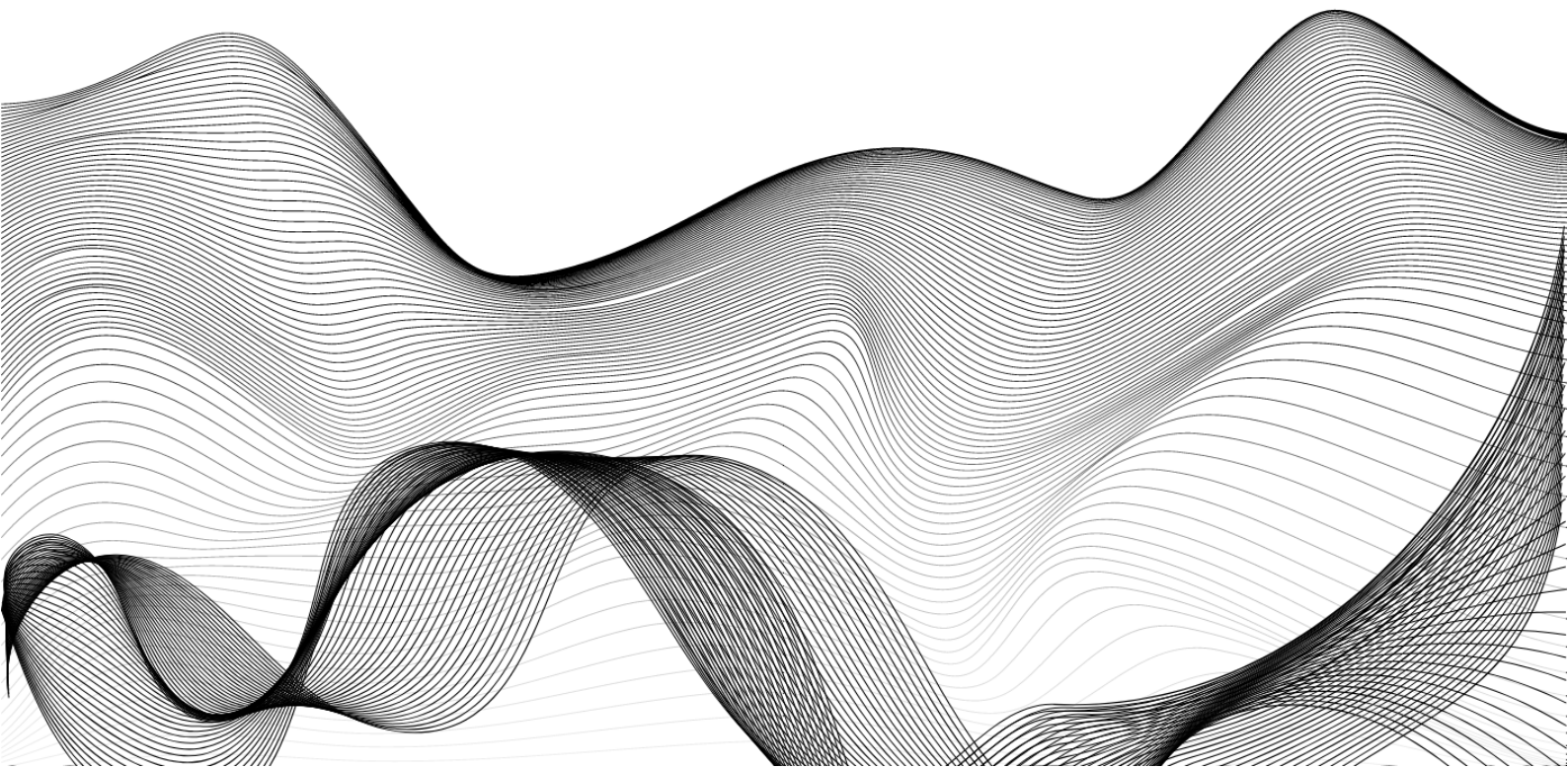




# Evaluation of Project Connect's Get Connected: Hemlington Programme

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This project was undertaken by Black Box Research and Consultancy Ltd. Their members attended sessions of Get Connected: Hemlington between January and May 2023 to collect qualitative data in the form of observations, surveys and semi-structured interviews for the purposes of evaluation.

Black Box is a nationally recognised criminal justice consultancy specialising in modern slavery with a specific focus on forced labour, criminal exploitation and county lines drug supply. The principal objectives of Black Box are to provide support to victims and survivors of modern slavery and to enhance public awareness both in domestic and international settings. By leveraging its knowledge in expert witness testimony, training and grass-roots evaluation, Black Box endeavours to equip professionals with the necessary tools to assist children, young people and vulnerable adults experiencing exploitative environments and contact with the Criminal Justice System.

Get Connected, delivered by Project Connect, is a six-month interactive programme that aims to bring cross-sector professionals and community members together. Project Connect comprises criminal justice professionals and those with experience of the Criminal Justice System. The facilitators of the programme guide participants in mapping a mutual understanding of the particular issues within their locality and how to tackle them by developing a shared action plan with tangible outcomes.

## Funding

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## Acknowledgements

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# Contents

	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
1.	<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
2.	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
3.	<b>Methods</b>	<b>9</b>
4.	<b>Findings</b>	<b>12</b>
5.	<b>Discussion</b>	<b>22</b>
6.	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>28</b>

# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1 Introduction

This report highlights the findings of an evaluation of Get Connected: Hemlington. The aim of Get Connected is to increase collaboration between local professionals and organisations engaged in the reduction and prevention of community youth violence.

## 1.2 Methods

A mixed-methods qualitative approach was used. Survey analysis permitted the acquisition of baseline results upon collaborative engagement between organisations. This was complimented by six semi-structured interviews conducted with participants who attended most, if not all, of the Get Connected: Hemlington sessions. Thematic analysis was utilised to identify themes on the programme's overall effectiveness, and to produce recommendations for the improvement of future iterations of Get Connected.

## 1.3 Findings

- Survey responses demonstrated that the most common form of collaboration prior to Get Connected: Hemlington was communication, where information was shared only.
- Police and the Local Authority were the two sectors that demonstrated the highest levels of contact with other organisations, with Probation and Education scoring the least.
- Relationship quality prior to participation was deemed to be highest between the Local Authority, Police and Youth Offending Services. Relationship quality with the Education sector was deemed to be the lowest.
- Interview participants noted the benefits of attending Get Connected: Hemlington. These included the ability to interact with new stakeholders, whereby connections were leveraged for knowledge exchange; and being provided with a space to challenge misconceptions around offending, and professional and organisational capacity to address youth violence.
- Delivering Get Connected programmes in quick succession effected impact and attendance, owed to the same professionals attending multiple iterations. Concerns were raised over the long-term

sustainability of Get Connected, with a lack of ownership and concrete plans/goals limiting the long-term success of participation.

- Absent influential organisations and stakeholders, particularly those from education, and fluctuating attendance were said to limit the programme's effectiveness.

## 1.4 Recommendations

- (1) Set clear collaboration goals, empower participants to take ownership and guide external implementation to ensure lasting post-programme momentum and sustainability
- (2) Emphasise commitment to attending Get Connected, engage sectors, target diversity and facilitate pre-session briefings
- (3) Sustain facilitator engagement across all sessions to prevent attrition and ensure ongoing support
- (4) Select for strategic delivery of Get Connected when operating in areas that are geographically close to each other, merging relevant areas to save time and prevent repetition and participant attrition
- (5) Coordinate programme timing to avoid overlap, maintain value for participants attending multiple Get Connected programmes in the same region, and ensure distinct content for each iteration
- (6) Introduce and promote participation in 'Stay Connected' sessions throughout the delivery of Get Connected
- (7) Promote ongoing participant feedback for programme enhancement. Adjust content, structure and facilitation according to input to address evolving needs effectively

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 The Get Connected Programme

Project Connect was founded in 2021 with the aim of creating meaningful connections to help develop strategy, vision and mission through harnessing the power of people within the statutory and third sector. This is enabled through Get Connected workshops which run over a period of six months via five interactive, full-day sessions.

This evaluation is based on a Get Connected programme conducted in Hemlington, which ran from January to May 2023. Hemlington, a ward within Middlesbrough, North Yorkshire, has a population of 6,568 and is under the jurisdiction of the Middlesbrough North Policing Neighbourhood, who operate as part of the Cleveland Police Force area.

The Get Connected: Hemlington programme was conducted over five days within a Hemlington-based community building. Each session sought to unite local stakeholders to increase awareness and understanding of the contextual factors contributing towards crime and youth violence within the local area. Attendees were supported in the creation of an action plan which contained actionable targets towards the implementation of achievable goals. All organisations were encouraged to effectively facilitate future violence prevention strategies that improve the lives of young people within their community. The structure of the sessions included:

Day One	What is a Gang	Developing a Strategic Approach
Day Two	Mapping the Problem	Partnership Working
Day Three	Assessment and Referral	Targeted and Effective Intervention
Day Four	Community Mobilisation	Local Leadership
Day Five	Breaking the Cycle	Lessons Learned and Implementation

### 2.2 Get Connected: Newport Evaluation

The evaluation of Get Connected: Hemlington builds upon findings taken from a recent exploratory evaluation of a Get Connected programme that took place in the neighbouring ward of Middlesbrough,

Newport (Get Connected: Newport). Through conducting interviews with participants who attended the Newport-based programme, Black Box's evaluation was able to provide a snapshot of positive outcomes attainable through participation in Get Connected.

Participants reported that their attendance of the Newport sessions encouraged increased multi-agency collaboration and a better understanding of the roles of professionals working within the local area. Joe and Carlus, as programme facilitators, were deemed to be influential to the attainment of these benefits, utilising their skill and dynamism to maintain engagement and promote critical discussion. The absence of senior leaders and influential figures, difficulties in striking a balance between allowing too much or too little time for critical discussion, and limited guidance upon the programme's conclusion were cited as limitations of the programme and were used to inform our recommendations for future iterations of the programme. These included, but were not limited to:

- (1) The need for greater engagement and attendance of senior and influential local stakeholders across all relevant sectors, and;
- (2) The allocation of a single point of contact to oversee concerns related to collaboration subsequent to the programme's conclusion.

## 2.3 Crime and Violence in Middlesbrough

The delivery of Get Connected within Hemlington is largely owed to the proliferating rates of violence reported in Middlesbrough in recent years. Cleveland Police Force, the territorial police force responsible for Middlesbrough, reported in 2020 that it had recorded the third highest rate for violent crimes in the country<sup>1</sup>. According to figures published by the ONS, there was a 15% increase in the number of incidents of crime in Cleveland between the years ending March 2022 and March 2023, this is significantly higher than the 5% increase in crime across England generally<sup>2</sup>. In total, there were 84,210 incidents of crime in Cleveland in the year ending March 2023, an increase of 10,720 upon the previous year<sup>3</sup>.

In a 2021 report by Crest Advisory it was reported that Middlesbrough based young people aged 11 to 17 years old showed the highest risk of becoming involved in serious violence, being a victim of violence or

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<sup>1</sup> Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland, 'Preventing & Addressing Serious Violence in Cleveland', *Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland*, 2020, <https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/content/uploads/2020/10/Appendix-A-Violence-in-Clevelandredact.pdf> (accessed 30 August 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics, 'Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area data tables', *Office for National Statistics*, 2023, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/policeforceareadatatables> (accessed 31 August 2023)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid



witnessing violence<sup>4</sup>. This was found to be the highest proportion of children when controlling for population size across the country. Cleveland Police have reported that rates of looked after children are among the worst in the country, and school exclusion rates, a key predictor of involvement in crime, have been found to be more than double the national average. Deprivation, another risk factor for youth violence, is also high; with 33% of children living in income deprived households, making Middlesbrough one of the most impoverished areas of the country<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, in the English Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IoD2019), Middlesbrough ranked in the top two most deprived districts regarding income deprivation among children<sup>6</sup>. Hemlington is an area of Middlesbrough that has faced much scrutiny for its recent contribution to these statistics, with police reporting that as many as 280 arrests had been implemented as part of Operation Fortress, a multi-agency operation implemented in February 2022 to tackle antisocial behaviour and crime in Hemlington<sup>7</sup>.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1 Theory of Change

For the purposes of this evaluation, in collaboration with Get Connected's programme facilitators, Black Box have co-constructed a Theory of Change (ToC). This has been used to inform our methodology on how best to attain empirical evidence that can accurately assess Project Connect's influence on local youth violence prevention (YVP) stakeholders. This has been informed by five key components required for effective monitoring and evaluation, including:

- Inputs: What resources are being brought into the intervention
- Process: What are the intervention components
- Outputs: What immediate results are linked to the process
- Outcomes: What are the indirect or intermediate effects
- Impacts: What is the long-term, societal-level goal being sought

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<sup>4</sup> Crest Advisory, 'Violence and Vulnerability', *Crest Advisory*, 2021, [https://64e09bbc-abdd-42c690a858992ce46e59.usrfiles.com/ugd/64e09b\\_5abf5bb2228a4b77a23237ba80ef86a4.pdf](https://64e09bbc-abdd-42c690a858992ce46e59.usrfiles.com/ugd/64e09b_5abf5bb2228a4b77a23237ba80ef86a4.pdf) (Accessed 31 August 2023)

<sup>5</sup> Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland, 'Preventing & Addressing Serious Violence in Cleveland', *Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland*, 2020, <https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/content/uploads/2020/10/Appendix-A-Violence-in-Clevelandredact.pdf> (accessed 30 August 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 'The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IoD2019)', HM Government, 2019, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/835115/IoD2019\\_Statistical\\_Release.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835115/IoD2019_Statistical_Release.pdf) (Accessed 31 August 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Cleveland Police, 'Reductions in ASB and Crime following Multi-Agency Operation', *Cleveland Police*, 2023, <https://www.cleveland.police.uk/news/cleveland/news/2023/february/huge-reductions-in-asb-and-crime-following-multi-agency-operation/> (Accessed 30 August 2023).

A Theory of Change is '*a Systemic and cumulative study of the links between activities, outcomes, and contexts of the initiative*'<sup>8</sup>. It is an effective monitoring and evaluation model as it provides a base to identify whether a programme is achieving what it sets out to achieve at various levels, while also sharpening the development and delivery of the programme. This has been operationalised within two different qualitative data collection periods, with the findings used to form the basis of this evaluation and to inform a new ToC model based on participants' positive and negative experiences.

## 3.2 Survey Assessment

The first data collection period involved the use of a survey to generate an understanding of the collaborative partnerships that participants were involved in. This included Local Authority, Police, Community, Youth Offending Services, Probation, Education and Housing. Space was provided for participants to highlight any other sectors who had not been mentioned with whom they were also engaged in collaboration with for the purpose of youth violence prevention. The types of partnerships were demarcated as such:

- 'Communication' (share information only)
- 'Cooperation' (work together informally to achieve common goals)
- 'Collaboration' (work together as a formal team with specific responsibilities)
- 'Fully Linked' (work together as a formal team; mutually plan and share staff or resources to accomplish goals) and;
- 'Not Linked' (do not work together)

Further questions were used to probe the state of these collaborations; assessing the frequency of contact between participants and the given sector ('daily', 'weekly', 'monthly', 'quarterly' 'annually', and 'no contact'), alongside the perceived quality of the relationship ('poor relationship' (little trust), 'fair relationship' (some trust), 'good relationship' (trust), 'excellent relationship' (high trust)).

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<sup>8</sup> James P. Connell, Anne C. Kubisch, 'Applying a Theory of Change Approach to the Evaluation of Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Progress, Prospects, and Problems', In *New approaches to evaluation community initiatives: Theory, measurement, and analysis*, ed. Karen Fulbright-Anderson, Anne C. Kubisch, James P. Connell, (Queenstown: Aspen, 1998), p. 2

### 3.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

The second phase of data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews once the programme had concluded. Participation was voluntary and all attendees were invited to take part. In total, the sample consisted of six participants who were interviewed about their experiences of the programme. The majority of participants had attended all sessions and represent an array of different sectors involved in youth violence prevention in Hemlington (Table 1). Interviews lasted between twenty-to-sixty minutes and were recorded using a mobile recording device. Participants were asked to reflect on:

- Previous experiences of multi-agency partnership working
- The extent to which collaboration had improved since attending Get Connected: Hemlington
- Whether attendance had already had an improved effect on youth violence in Hemlington
- The roles of Joe and Carlus as programme facilitators
- The structure and delivery of Get Connected
- Any improvements that could be implemented in future iterations of the programme across the UK

Qualitative data analysis was conducted via the use of NVivo 12. Researchers carried out inductive thematic analysis and identified themes via coding. These have been used to formulate conclusions on what works and why, while also providing recommendations for improvement.

Participant ID	Sector	Number of Sessions Attended	Participation in Get Connected: Newport
A	Youth Offending Service	5	Yes
B	Community	5	Yes
C	Youth Offending Service	5	Yes
D	Housing	5	No
E	Social Work	5	Yes
F	Police	3	Yes

Table 1. Profiles of interview participants

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Survey Analysis

The following section will provide an overview of the findings from the surveys and interviews, with survey analyses presented first due to their providing an understanding into the scope of collaborative work within Hemlington among its youth violence stakeholders.

### 4.2 Involvement Type

To initially assess the scale of multi-agency collaboration between Hemlington-based youth violence prevention stakeholders and practitioners, participants were asked to define their respective partnership type (see 3.2) with each given sector (Police, Local Authority, Youth Offending Services, Education, Probation, Community services).

Table 2 depicts the total score for each partnership type. This data demonstrates the cumulative frequency of each type of partnership a participant had identified across the six sectors. Blank responses were not accounted for in the analysis of the results, and answers where participants were corresponding to the same organisational sector that they worked within were also removed. Communication, what we deemed to be the most basic type of partnership work, was the most frequently utilised partnership type between participants in Hemlington.

Involvement Type	Total
Not Linked	9
Communication	17
Cooperation	14
Collaboration	13
Fully Linked	12

Table 2. Total scores for type of partnership engaged in by surveyed participants

### 4.3 Contact Frequency

Frequency of contact is an indicator of effective partnership work, with regular communication and points of contact between organisations able to facilitate enhanced community youth violence prevention. Contact frequency was assessed on a 4-point scale (1= Daily, 2=Weekly, 3= Quarterly, 4=Annually). Blank responses were not accounted for in the analysis of the results. Answers from participants corresponding to the same organisational sector that they worked within were also removed.

A mean average contact frequency score was calculated for each YVP sector, with lower values demonstrating more frequent contact with that given sector. This can aid assumptions about which sector is key to YVP in Hemlington. From the scale displayed in Figure 1, only two sectors (Police and Local Authority) were believed to engage in daily to weekly contact with other professionals. Education and Probation were the weakest sectors in this metric, who appeared to engage in contact with participants on a quarterly basis. This could limit their contribution to effective partnership work, despite being key to a holistic youth violence prevention strategy.

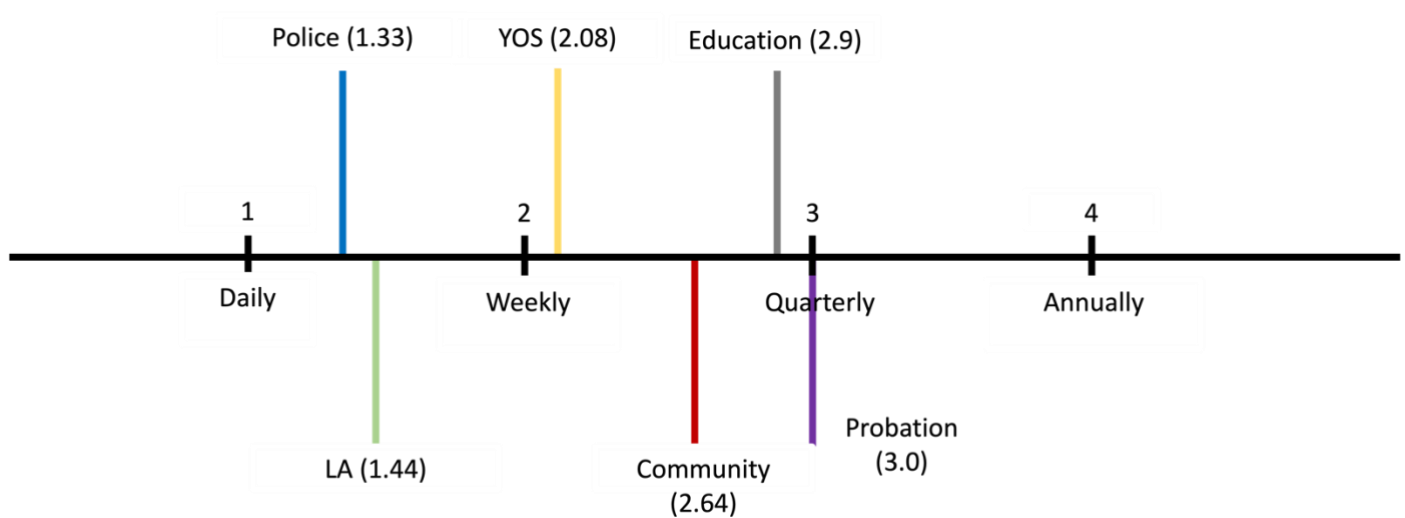


Figure 1. A scale depicting the frequency of contact between participants and the six key YVP sectors

### 4.4 Relationship Quality

Participants were asked to rank the perceived quality of their current relationship with each sector of YVP on a 4-point scale (1=Poor; 2=Fair; 3=Good; 4=Excellent). A mean average score for relationship quality was calculated for each YVP sector from these responses. Higher values corresponded to a greater relationship with that given sector, as displayed in Figure 2. A positive relationship appeared to be apparent between

frequency of contact and relationship quality. The top three sectors that demonstrated greater frequency of contact (Police, Local Authority and YOS) also demonstrated higher average scores for relationship quality. A negative correlation was evident for the Education sector which, alongside demonstrating the second poorest average score for frequency of contact, also demonstrated the only sector to showcase an average relationship score (1.91) that fell between poor and fair. This could add insight into this sector’s lack of attendance in Get Connected. Probation was an outlier; despite scoring the worst for frequency of contact, this sector still assumed a score that categorised its relationship as fair to good. This could be owed to communication within this sector not being as essential to the daily practices of others, with its success owed to a different indicator as yet identified.

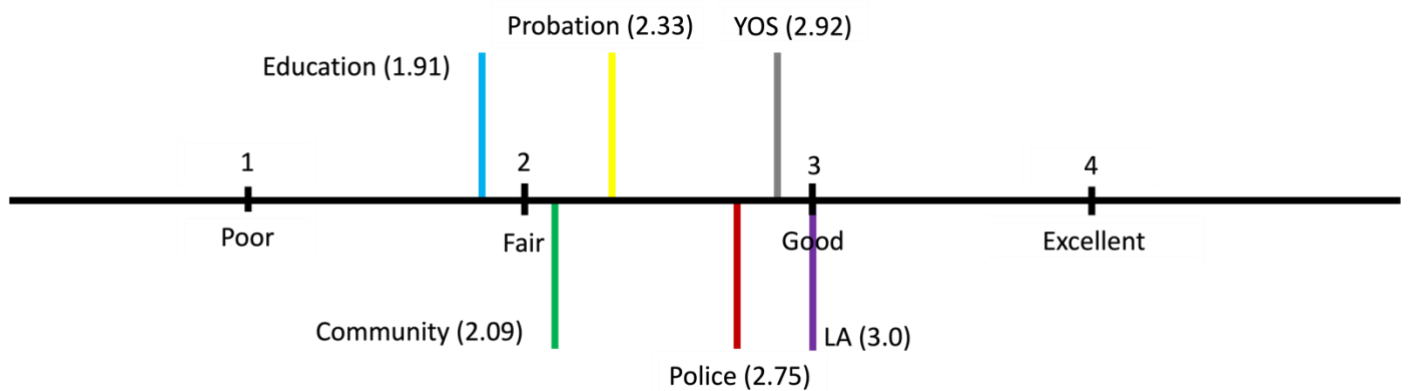


Figure 2. A scale depicting the relationship between participants and the six key YVP sectors

## 4.5 Interview Analysis

Six interviews were conducted with participants who had attended most, if not all, of the Get Connected: Hemlington sessions. These interviews played a pivotal role in informing researchers about the impact of participation on collaboration among youth violence stakeholders, while also highlighting the mechanisms through which Get Connected: Hemlington had facilitated this development.

Researchers identified a total of eight themes from the analysis, which included; (1) Group Integration; (2) Information Sharing; (3) Challenging Misconceptions; (4) Critical Discussion; (5) Lived Experience; (6) Challenges of a Hyperlocal Approach; (7) Long Term Maintenance, and; (8) Challenges in Stakeholder Engagement. The themes were separated into two categories; (1) benefits of participating in Get Connected: Hemlington, and; (2) areas for improvement/recommendations. The following paragraphs discuss these themes in more depth and utilise quotations sourced from the interview data.

## 4.6 Group Integration

Recognising the significance of participants understanding the roles, visions and values of each attending youth violence prevention professional, the introduction of a seating plan by Joe and Carlus' emerged as a noteworthy strategy. By strategically seating members from diverse sectors together, participants pointed out that this approach proved effective in integrating stakeholders and fostering a conducive environment for interactions to flourish.

*"We were plonked onto tables with people we didn't know, which for me was great because actually, the whole point of it then is, you know, not to sit with your mate. It's to go and sit with other agencies and people that you didn't know. And I thought it was really interactive, and it was really good."* (Participant 3)

## 4.7 Information Sharing

By fostering collaboration among community stakeholders and promoting cross-sector interactions, a solid groundwork was established for enriching knowledge exchange. This initiative enabled participants to connect with previously unfamiliar organisations and departments, a connection they might not otherwise have encountered before attendance of Get Connected: Hemlington. This initial interaction paved the way for increased information sharing, leading to the development of numerous informal channels dedicated to knowledge exchange among the participants of Get Connected: Hemlington.

*"The impact on multi-agency working has been second to none for the young people we are supporting in Hemlington and Middlesbrough wide. We have built up strong links with Neighbourhood policing around Hemlington and the fact that we got a neighbourhood Inspector to a strategy to discuss the concerns, support, safeguarding and disruption for a young man was amazing. Without Get Connected I don't think this would have happened. The joint working with Police teams (Complex Exploitation and CID) has been built up through networking too and this has helped us secure the safety of young people in the area and also helped to increase disruption. The team have also built-up relationships with Housing, Youth and Neighbourhood safety through Get Connected and we will continue to forge these moving forward for our young people, families and community."* (Participant 2)

*“I have seen an awful lot of changes and I have seen people starting to ask questions now with people starting to offer up information and looking at bringing back some of the meetings that we used to have before the dreaded COVID hit where we would share an awful lot of information.” (Participant 1)*

*“I think there's definitely organisations we'd never heard of. There's definitely untapped resource that we weren't aware of.” (Participant 1)*

## 4.8 Challenging Misconceptions

Central to this knowledge exchange was ensuring that every stakeholder gained an understanding of the realities faced by children and young people at risk of violence. Parallel to this, it was crucial to foster an appreciation for the existing capabilities within each participating sector to contribute effectively to this cause. Joe and Carlus were praised for their early implementation of a process that challenged preconceived notions and deepened comprehension of the organisational capacity of the sectors in the room, and those pertinent to youth violence prevention. Participants found it useful to use this platform to articulate the resources at their disposal and the prevailing constraints on their ability to lead in youth violence prevention in Hemlington. Moreover, Get Connected facilitated provided a space for diverse viewpoints and facilitated insightful comparisons. Participants greatly benefited from discussions about distinct approaches to tackling youth crime and violence. They gleaned valuable insights from each other's successes and shortcomings concerning various prevention methods, whether rooted in child-focused, proactive measures or punitive strategies.

*“The first day was enlightening for me in the sense of, you just realise how much people in the area don't know about what's going on. And there was some sort of key individuals that really should have known what's happening on their doorstep and didn't. Either that or [they] had some real rose-tinted glasses on. You know, we've kind of gone ‘No, that is a gang and that is happening in that area, here is the police information, it's telling you what's going on ... you need to open your eyes and see what's happening.” (Participant 3)*

*“I remember someone thinking there was like 20 or 30 of us working in Neighbourhood, and it's like, no, it's two. They just didn't understand.” (Participant 6)*



*“I think the Inspector had a particular view about these young people. Quite a punitive approach. And where we're coming from youth justice, I think they kind of see us with our youth justice, child first principles as being a bit namby pamby, hug a tree, and we're saying it's not about that actually, it's just about trying to look at it from the child's world, to unpick the why rather than the how, and just see past the behaviour and then focus on the child. And I think we eventually got there. So there's been some subtleties within what's happened in the group as well and he's definitely come around a little bit ... It's been interesting to watch his change of view.” (Participant 3)*

## 4.9 Critical Discussion

The substantial benefits stemming from participation in Get Connected: Hemlington were largely attributed to the adept techniques employed by Joe and Carlus. Their skilful approach in facilitating reflective discussions, defusing tensions, and sustaining engagement greatly influenced the outcomes. The sessions provided a space where participants could challenge misconceptions related to a sector's role, capacity, or approach to youth violence prevention in Hemlington, often leading to spirited debates. Joe and Carlus garnered praise for their proficiency in steering these discussions and managing tensions. Harnessing their capabilities as programme facilitators, Joe and Carlus established an environment where participants felt free to express their thoughts and opinions. They demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity by ensuring each counter-argument was heard and by maintaining focus on the topic at hand. Their teamwork was evident in their ability to gauge the room's dynamics and make suitable interventions to sustain engagement. Within this framework, no individual was left out of debate; all participants were treated impartially and equally, with no consideration for job titles or positions.

*“I think they manage it really well; I think they pick up on people's cues, and they pick up on when there's a little bit of tension and pull that out, or challenge that thinking or make us really think outside the box. They bounce off each other so well. A little bit like sometimes good cop, bad cop, kind of. I think they just bounce off each other so well to get the best out of us.” (Participant 5)*

*“You can see that with Joe and Carlus in the way they levelled the playing field with everybody. You know, just because you're a Chief Inspector in Middlesbrough Police doesn't mean you're any bloody better or worse than the woman who works you know, in the food bank. And that*

*for me is, it's a priceless talent to have. And especially when you're talking about something like getting connected, because people don't want to connect with somebody who they think is going to talk down to them or who is going to think well, I'm way above you so why would I want to talk to you, and I have never ever seen that. They will not allow that to happen. They're very good at putting people in their place without that person even knowing that they've been put in their place makes. It seriously is a skill. I haven't got that skill.” (Participant 1)*

## 4.10 Lived Experience

The lived experiences of both Joe and Carlus have consistently served as valuable resources, frequently tapped into to enrich and advance critical discussions during the sessions. Joe's expertise and background as a youth worker and former youth club manager played a pivotal role in scenarios where mediating tensions and proactively challenging preconceived notions were vital. Additionally, Carlus' personal experiences of the Criminal Justice System came to the forefront, particularly in the well-received 'Boy X, Boy Y' session. This session proved highly effective in reshaping participants' stereotypes of those who offend and the potential positive outcomes of youth violence prevention efforts. Furthermore, it commanded a high level of respect among participants. Carlus' journey and transformation served to solidify the credibility and value of his insights shared throughout the sessions, further reinforcing the participants' trust and appreciation for his perspectives.

*“I think what Joe brings to it as well, with his experience of running youth clubs, and having that lived experience as a professional really, he brings that to the table as well. And all that experience is hard. Yeah, around that you can see his passion, you can see that want, you know, wanting people to change, wanting to challenge people's views.” (Participant 5)*

*“I think the thing with Carlus, with his lived experience, he can bring that into the room and it shuts people up actually, because, you know, people can sit and spout about this, that and the other, but he goes, “here's what happened to me, here's my life”. I think when you are in the room with that person with that experience, it's almost validated isn't it, in a way?” (Participant 1)*

## 4.11 Challenges of a Hyperlocal Approach

While participants expressed their enjoyment and the value they derived from their involvement in Get Connected: Hemlington, suggestions for enhancing future iterations of the programme primarily centred around its geographical scope and long-term sustainability. Get Connected: Hemlington took place in close succession to another Middlesbrough-based programme, namely Get Connected: Newport. This proximity had an impact on how participants perceived the distinct value of their engagement with the Hemlington initiative. Specifically, individuals who had participated more extensively in the Newport programme tended to perceive fewer benefits from their involvement in the Hemlington programme. This phenomenon could be attributed to the overlap of attendees between the two programmes. The recurring presence of the same individuals across both initiatives was identified as a factor that curtailed the potential for novel partnerships to form and for new insights to be gained, as the content of the sessions remained largely unchanged. While participants still enjoyed and recognised the value of their participation, a prevailing consensus emerged that if the hyperlocal approach of the programme were to persist within the Middlesbrough region, its overall impact could be considerably impeded. It is worth noting that this observation does not undermine the value of maintaining a hyperlocal focus, but rather suggests that even greater value might be achieved by broadening the geographical scope. This becomes particularly pertinent in situations where the programme may be rolled out within the same region and similar timeframe, as it is likely that the same stakeholders would participate once again.

*“I think a lot of people who were involved in Hemo [Hemlington] were also involved in Newport because it's not a massive place, but it has some very sort of distinct problem areas. I think you could have done one for Middlesbrough. I don't think that you can be something for everyone, so I know that there's these issues in Newport that would have been probably slightly different from Hemlington and from say, Brambles Farm or Berwick Hills, where we've had problems. Berwick Hills and Hemlington would have been very, very similar, probably the same people ... I think as well as that if you go for Hemlington as just a single place, when you come out you're like 'right what are we going to do about it?' How many options have you actually got? Because it's so small really.” (Participant 6)*

*“The difficulty with Hemlington has been for those of us who have already been through Newport, some of the content was repeated. I'm a really busy person and to take a full day out to go and listen to some of the same things again was a bit frustrating if I'm honest. So I*

*understood the benefit of that for everybody else ... But yeah, I think some of that was a little bit repetitive and you can see people kind of switching off a little bit, because they'd heard it once already. Whereas with Newport, it was new, and it was fresh, and everyone was revved up and all of that. We got to Hemlington and people were like, [sighs] 'yeah I know, we've done a bit of this'. So, you know, it felt less energetic because people were a bit fatigued by that. And it wasn't five minutes since we just finished Newport as well. But, you know, I understand all the value, I get it all and for people who hadn't heard it the first time.” (Participant 3)*

## 4.12 Long Term Maintenance

Enhanced information sharing among stakeholders in Hemlington, facilitated through engagement in Get Connected: Hemlington, has proven successful. Nevertheless, concerns were raised regarding the sustained success and long-term viability of these informal collaborations and working relationships. In interviews, participants expressed apprehension about the limited progress made by the Steering Group since the programme's conclusion. Steering Group members, selected by Joe and Carlus, voiced the challenges that they faced in allocating time for organising meetings and implementing proactive measures to uphold these collaborations. This hindrance was partially attributed to the more hands-off approach adopted by Joe and Carlus in the final sessions and at the conclusion of the programme. While this approach aimed to foster participant ownership of the nascent Steering Group post-programme, it did not yield the desired outcome. To address this issue, participants proposed that Joe and Carlus offer concrete objectives and targets for effective collaboration, along with guidance on how to implement these measures externally. Additionally, participants recommended the need for ongoing guidance at the programme's conclusion, emphasising the importance of introducing Stay Connected, the post-Get Connected supplementary programme, at an earlier stage to provide essential support.

*“I suppose for me, it's the so what now element, isn't it? That's what the next bit is for me. So we spent that time together doing that, obviously Joe and that won't be with us, Carlus won't be with us forever, what does that now mean, have we done enough? Do we understand it enough to then actually do something with that? Or is it just another document that's going to sit on a shelf somewhere?” (Participant 4)*

*“I suppose the thing is, it's a really early time to really say whether it's done what it was going to do, because it's only just, we've only just had the five sessions if that makes sense. We can't*

*see the outcome from it. I would rather obviously see something tangible actually happen after we obviously had those sessions, if that makes sense.” (Participant 6)*

### 4.13 Challenges in Stakeholder Engagement

Enhancing collaboration hinges on securing buy-in from the appropriate stakeholders. Interviewees expressed reservations about the commitment displayed by certain youth violence prevention stakeholders in Hemlington, noting fluctuations in attendance over the course of the programme. For those consistently present at each session, frustrations arose when they had to bring their less-frequent counterparts up to speed on missed discussions. Compounding these issues was the absence of local school (education) representatives, a significant sector within youth violence prevention, which had ranked lowest in initial relationship quality surveys. Remarkably, not a single representative from local schools participated in any of the sessions. This omission significantly constrains the ability of other organisations to establish connections and share insights. However, it is important to note that there are currently no secondary schools within the Hemlington area. This context indicates that from an external perspective, engaging in a programme centred around a different, yet close geographical area might seem like a misallocation of time and resources. To enhance participation, broadening the geographical focus could be beneficial, allowing participants to perceive greater advantages from the outset.

*“I think the problem with that was that some people came just for that one session, so they hadn't been through all of them, or they'd been in and out and they hadn't been to it in full. So that confused them and it was hard to get them up to speed.” (Participant 2)*

*“Everyone's the busiest organisation in the world. Every person is the busiest person in the world. I'm sure they are, and don't get me wrong, I wouldn't want to be a social worker for all the tea in China. You know, I just like, awful job. But you could see there was, you could see there was some resistance with some people. The schools never turned up so we never made any links with the schools which was disappointing.” (Participant 6)*

*“The school's non-attendance at the Hemlington one has been glaringly obvious. And I mean glaringly obvious and shocking. And I mean, shocking.” (Participant 1)*

## 5. Discussion

Participant insights from their engagement with Get Connected: Hemlington have been integral to shaping the development of a Theory of Change (ToC) model. A Theory of Change serves as a visual representation of the mechanisms and rationale underlying the success of complex processes in attaining specific outcomes. It serves as a blueprint outlining the essential components required for a particular intervention to be effective. In essence, it *“is a method that explains how a given intervention, or set of interventions, are expected to lead to a specific development change, drawing on a causal analysis based on available evidence.”*<sup>9</sup> A Theory of Change (ToC) encompasses five distinct components: inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes, and impact. Inputs signify the programme elements initially implemented by facilitators to yield the desired impact.

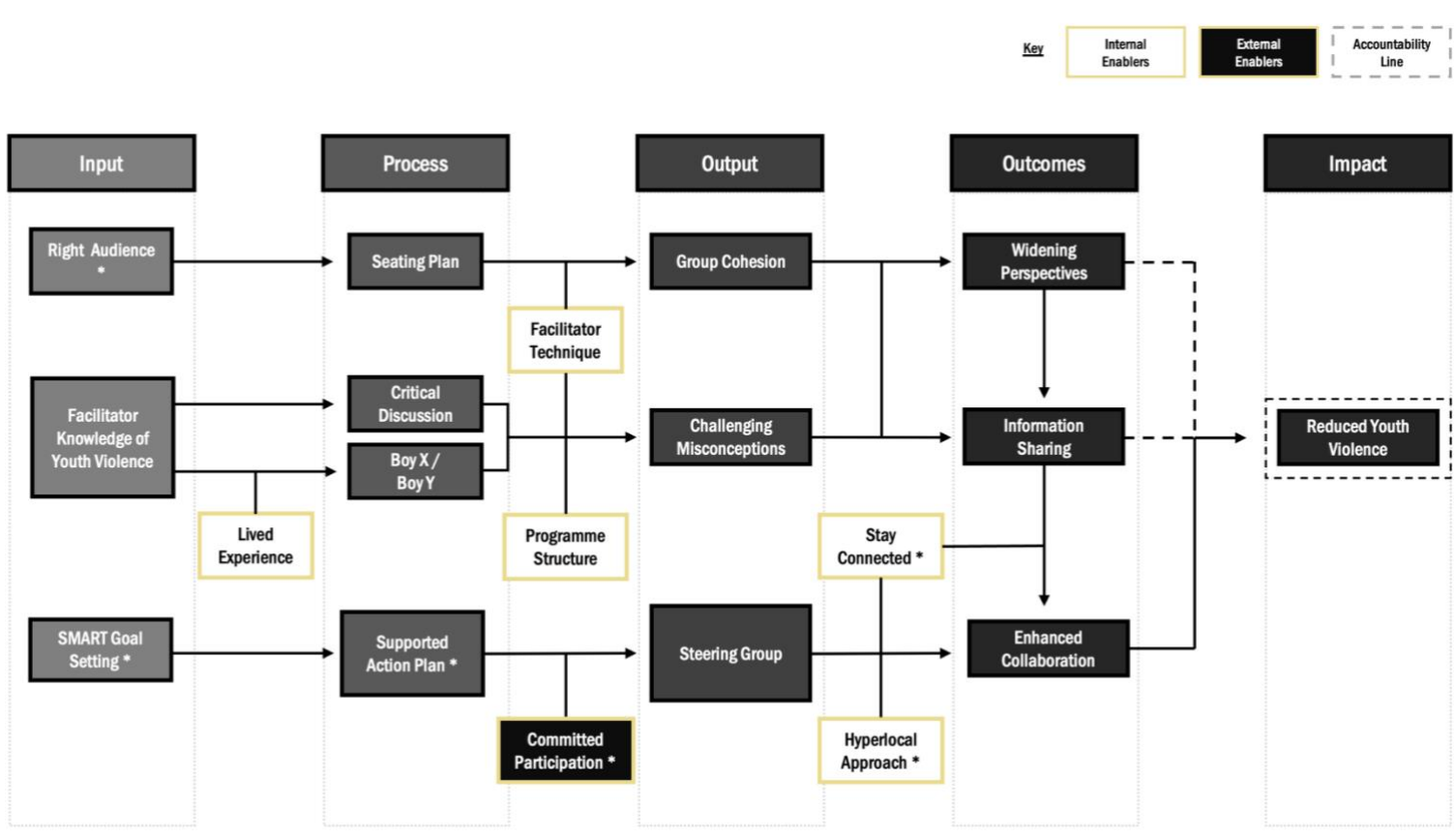


Figure 3. A Theory of Change for Get Connected based on findings from interviews with Hemlington-based participants

The primary objective of this Theory of Change (Figure 3) is to illustrate the interconnected causal relationships between the various factors experienced by participants during their involvement with Get Connected: Hemlington. These factors collectively contribute to the ultimate goal of reducing youth violence.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Development Group, 'Theory of Change UNDAF Companion Guidance', *United Nations Development Group*, 2016, p. 3, <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/UNDG-UNDAF-Companion-Pieces-7-Theory-of-Change.pdf> (Accessed 30 August 2023).

The construction of this ToC draws extensively from the insights gleaned during interview feedback. This model illuminates both successful elements and areas for improvement, aiming to serve as a guide for Joe and Carlus when developing and delivering future iterations. The components that require improvement have been demarcated with asterisks within the model. These insights have been used to inform our future recommendations. By applying this ToC in subsequent programme iterations, Joe and Carlus can streamline the programme's structure to enhance overall success.

## 5.1 Input

Within our ToC model, we identified three pivotal inputs necessary for effective future implementation, two of which participants found to be deficient. One crucial input, acknowledged by participants, was the presence of the right audience. Participants emphasised the importance of involving stakeholders who hold significance and influence within the local YVP framework from the programme's outset. This inclusion would enhance participants' opportunity for connection, integration, and collaboration with individuals capable of instigating and sustaining change.

Another essential input, as identified by participants, is the implementation of SMART goals. These goals serve as a guide to help participants discern the contours of effective collaborative practices, understand their potential outcomes and learn how to maintain them.

Additionally, participants appreciated Joe and Carlus for providing contemporary and contextually relevant knowledge of youth violence — an input said to greatly benefit attendees throughout the sessions.

## 5.2 Process

Processes, a vital aspect of the ToC, pertain to the specific activities that Joe and Carlus introduced to facilitate the achievement of desired outputs. These processes are instrumental in guiding participants toward the objectives - namely, the reduction of youth violence. Given the interconnected nature of the ToC, inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes exert mutual influence, collectively determining the programme's success in achieving its intended impact. For instance, with the right audience in attendance, the seating plan enacted by Joe and Carlus serves as a process that fosters interactions among stakeholders who may not have otherwise met.

The facilitators' ability to demonstrate contemporary and contextually relevant knowledge of youth violence encouraged robust critical discussion that provided a platform for participants and others to share and evaluate their experience of working toward youth violence prevention.

Carlus' "Boy X and Boy Y" session, enriched by his contemporary knowledge of youth violence and the Criminal Justice System, particularly resonated with participants, inspiring thought and fostering authentic connections among the group.

However, the ToC also highlights areas for improvement. One such instance is the integration of an action plan that is fully supported by programme facilitators. Participants expressed a preference for a more hands-on approach from Joe and Carlus, especially concerning the future sustainability of partnerships fostered during Get Connected. This hands-on approach could include allocating more time and resource into facilitating the creation of the Steering Group and ensuring it comprises dedicated community leaders, therefore promoting the enduring viability of collaborative partnerships.

### 5.3 Output

Outputs within the ToC framework encompass both tangible and intangible outcomes resulting from the programme process/activities. Our ToC illustrates that incorporating the right participants and introducing measures that encourage interaction (e.g. seating plans) enhances group cohesion, thereby aiding the collective pursuit of shared goals. Similarly, critical discussions and awareness prompted by Carlus' "Boy X and Boy Y" session enabled participants to challenge misconceptions and to clarify organisational and professional capacities, community roles, and approaches to youth violence prevention. Moreover, the implementation of a fully supported action plan involved forming a Steering Group comprised of committed community leaders - a necessary and proactive measure designed to secure the long-term sustainability of collaborative partnerships.

### 5.4 Outcomes

The outcomes of this ToC illustrate the direct benefits that participation in Get Connected: Hemlington was designed to yield. One notable outcome, achieved through group cohesion, is the expansion of participants' perspectives. The integration of participants within the group facilitates interactions with organisations and stakeholders that might have otherwise been inaccessible or unfamiliar to each other. This widened



perspective not only allows participants to challenge misconceptions but also fosters an environment where group members can readily share information among themselves. With misconceptions rectified by real-world interactions and scenarios, participants gain insight into whom they can approach for pertinent information and to whom they can confidently share their own insights with. These outcomes naturally cultivate enhanced collaboration which is further supported by the establishment of a comprehensive Steering Group. The Steering Group plays a pivotal role in overseeing the continuity of working relationships and holding organisations and professionals to account with regard to the implementation of the action plan.

According to the ToC, when these components align effectively, organisations will engage in consistent knowledge exchange and increased collaborative efforts. Key stakeholders engaged in youth violence prevention can pool resources, implementing more effective protocols aimed at addressing this issue.

## 5.5 Impact

The involvement in Get Connected and the resultant outcomes will contribute to the reduction of youth violence within the programme's designated locale. In essence, this ToC underscores the interdependence of its components. The interconnectedness of group unification, information sharing, collaboration, and the stewardship of a comprehensive Steering Group forms a cohesive framework that, when executed harmoniously, propels youth violence prevention efforts towards success.

At the pinnacle of this ToC model lies the envisioned impact - reduced youth violence - symbolising the ultimate goal toward which all inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes converge. The interaction between these components is what propels the trajectory toward this impactful outcome. The strategic inputs, such as the presence of appropriate professionals and influential stakeholders from the outset, and the implementation of SMART goals, lay the foundations for success. These inputs determine the subsequent processes, orchestrating group interactions, discussions, and guided critical reflections, all of which drive participants towards desired outputs. The outputs, in turn, are the tangible expressions of progress, emerging as participants' perspectives widen, and their capacities to challenge misconceptions and share insights deepen. The interrelation between outputs and outcomes is evident, as the enhanced collaboration facilitated by a comprehensive Steering Group advances the practical application of the shared knowledge. The cumulative effect of the interactions among inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes join together to result in the ultimate impact of reduced youth violence.

In essence, this ToC illuminates how the orchestrated synergy among these components pave the way to the overarching impact. It underscores that the success in achieving the ultimate goal of reduced youth violence is not the result of any single factor, but a combination of well-aligned inputs, well-directed processes, constructive outputs, and meaningful outcomes.

## 5.6 Enablers

It is important to note the key enablers that interact with the factors located within the five components of the ToC. Enablers refer to the ‘conditions or factors that need to be present or absent to allow an organisation or project’s work to succeed’. Two kinds of enablers have been illustrated within this ToC; internal enablers and external enablers. According to Harries et al.:

*“Internal enablers need to exist inside an organisation for a Theory of Change to work and are mostly within an organisation or project’s control. Internal enablers describe the mechanisms by which an organisation delivers its work (such as the quality of services, relationships and the values and attitudes of staff). External enablers need to exist in the external environment for a Theory of Change to work and are often beyond an organisation or project’s immediate control. External enablers describe the context in which an organisation works (such as social, cultural, economic and political factors, laws, regulations, and working with other organisations)”<sup>10</sup>.*

## 5.7 Internal Enablers

**Lived experience** stands as a notable illustration of an internal enabler, where the prior employment roles and life histories of programme facilitators equip them with essential insights that can be harnessed to support programme management and to bolster confidence in their methods.

**Facilitator technique** emphasises the crucial role of programme facilitators as important mediators in driving group cohesion and defusing tensions inherent in critical discussions.

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<sup>10</sup> Ellen Harries, Lindsay Hodgson, James Noble, ‘Creating Your Theory of Change: NPC’s practical guide’, *New Philanthropy Capital*, London, 2014, p. 4, <https://golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk/documents/Creating-your-theory-of-change1.pdf> (Accessed 30 August 2023).

The **programme's structure**, particularly its extended duration spanning several months, functions as an internal enabler. This allows for periods of reflection between sessions, encouraging participants to absorb and implement lessons, some of which might initially challenge their preconceptions.

The introduction of **Stay Connected** - a longer-term less intensive supplementary programme designed to offer further support and training to attendees of Get Connected - has emerged as an important component requiring prompt initiation following the conclusion of Get Connected. Its role is pivotal to providing the necessary guidance to sustain the legacy of Get Connected, ensuring its long-term viability.

Lastly, the **hyperlocal approach** adopted by Get Connected proves advantageous. This approach ensures the attainment of contemporary, contextually relevant, and actionable goals and targets. With that in mind, careful consideration is required to determine the optimal geographical scope of the programme, ensuring the facilitation of sustained collaboration among participants while keeping the programme's goals effectively aligned.

## 5.8 External Enablers

**Committed participation** - the only external enabler illustrated in the Toc – serves as an example of a component that requires improvement. The success of both collaboration and the Steering Group hinges on participants demonstrating unwavering commitment, attending every session and actively engaging in each. This aspect needs some attention in order to ensure optimal outcomes.

## 6. Recommendations

Researchers devised seven recommendations based on the survey and interview data to enhance the effectiveness of future Get Connected programme rollouts. By implementing these recommendations, future iterations can be rolled out more effectively, fostering greater knowledge exchange, collaboration, and positive outcomes among participants.

### 6.1 Tailored Goals and Action Plans

Provide clear objectives and actionable goals for effective collaboration and post-programme momentum. Encourage participants to take ownership of collaborations and provide guidance on implementing these measures externally, fostering sustainability beyond the programme's conclusion.

### 6.2 Strengthen Stakeholder Commitment

Prioritise stakeholder buy-in and commitment. Work closely with relevant sectors to ensure consistent attendance throughout the programme. Target participants from a wide variety of sectors involved in youth violence prevention. Facilitate pre-session briefings for irregular attendees to keep them abreast of missed information without detracting from the sessions' flow.

### 6.3 Regulate Facilitator Involvement

Maintain consistent involvement of facilitators throughout the programme, including its later sessions. Active engagement of facilitators can prevent potential drop-off in attendance and ensure continued guidance and support.

### 6.4 Address Geographic Scope

Be conscious of utilising hyperlocal iterations of the programme, especially within close proximity to each other. If multiple Get Connected programmes are to be implemented in quick succession and in a nearby locality, programme facilitators may benefit from combining areas that are contextually relevant and geographically similar. This is to prevent repetition of information and make the best use of participants'

time; two components that were hindered by Get Connected: Newport and Get Connected: Hemlington both being delivered within a short space of time.

## 6.5 Optimise Timing and Sequencing

Where Get Connected programmes are rolled out in multiple localities within a geographic area, carefully plan the timing of successive programmes to avoid any overlap that might dilute participants' perceived value of attending. Ensure that each iteration presents distinct content, preventing redundancy for participants involved in multiple programmes.

## 6.6 Sustain Post-Programme Engagement

Introduce participants into the Stay Connected programme early. This is an essential component that should be implemented in conjunction with the Get Connected programme to provide a guiding hand in the early stages of the Steering Group. This is to ensure participation is effective, with the Stay Connected sessions facilitating continued discussions between key youth violence prevention stakeholders who have expressed concerns about being too busy to commit their time without structured sessions being provided or designated. Having Joe and Carlus present in the work conducted after Get Connected provides a needed instigator to champion and support post-programme collaboration, a task and responsibility that at present is deemed to be too complex and difficult to implement by one person or organisation alone.

## 6.7 Feedback and Adaptation

Encourage participants to provide feedback throughout the programme to identify areas for improvement. Adapt the content, structure, and facilitation approach based on participant input to better meet their evolving needs.