



**LANCASHIRE**  
VIOLENCE REDUCTION  
NETWORK

# **Independent evaluation of the LVRN Champions (Divert) Programme for adults aged 18+ years**

## **A mixed methods approach**

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**NIHR** | Applied Research Collaboration  
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## 1. Introduction

Champions (DIVERT) is an intervention programme to divert young adults aged 18-25 who primarily have been detained for violent crime offences, away from crime and to reduce re-offending by offering support to make positive changes in their lives. The 'Champions' programme is delivered through a partnership between the Lancashire Violence Reduction Network, Lancashire Police and nine football Community Trusts<sup>1</sup> across Lancashire. Since its inception, Champions has broadened its targeted age group and developed into an intervention programme supporting young people aged, 10-25 years. However, this evaluation is based solely on the work with clients aged 18+, whilst those aged under 18's will be evaluated in a subsequent report.

In 2023, Lancaster University via the Applied Research Collaboration Northwest Coast were commissioned to conduct an independent evaluation of the programme and produce a written report to assess the impacts of the programme on participants, making recommendations for future delivery.

This qualitative evaluation report explores the collated output data sets for the programme and presents a series of participant case studies exploring the impact of the programme on individual participants. The report draws headline conclusions and offers a series of practical recommendations for continued programme development.

## 2. Context

The UK Government Home Office published its Serious Violence Strategy in 2018<sup>2</sup>. The strategy encouraged a multi-agency, whole-system public health approach to violence prevention, seeking to improve the health and safety of individuals by addressing underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that an individual will become a victim or perpetrator of violence.

The Lancashire Violence Reduction Network (LVRN) is a network of multi-agency partners and specialists working together to implement a public health approach to tackle violence and its root causes and embedding trauma informed practice within the workforce and partnership organisations to allow partners to recognise and respond to the wide impact of trauma and the cases and effects of violent behaviour<sup>3</sup>.

The LVRN agreed definition of 'serious violence' includes the following offences: Homicide; knife crime; gun crime; assault resulting in injury; rape; robbery; aggravated burglary; domestic abuse and violence;

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<sup>1</sup> Accrington Stanley Community Trust; AFC Fylde Community Foundation; Blackburn Rovers Community Trust; Blackpool FC Community Trust; Burnley in the Community; Fleetwood Town Community Trust; Morecambe FC Community Sports; Preston North End Community and Education Trust; and Wigan Athletic Community Trust

<sup>2</sup> <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5acb21d140f0b64fed0afd55/serious-violence-strategy.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://arc-nwc.nihr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Lancashire-Violence-Reduction-Network-Trauma-Informed-Programmes.pdf>

and child exploitation. This definition allowed them to explore the data on serious violence summarised in the table below.

**Table 1: What do we know about the perpetrators of serious violence?**

- 17% repeat offending rate for serious violence offences
- An average of 3.5 re-offences per re-offender in Lancashire
- 20% perpetrators are aged 16 – 25 years and 12% aged 11-15 years
- 39% of serious violence is domestic abuse related
- 21% suspect intoxicated
- 11% is youth related
- 11% is weapon related
- 8% is mental health related

Source: [Serious Violence in Lancashire. Strategic Needs Assessment \(2024\)](#)

As part of the LVRN approach to embedding trauma informed practice, it commissioned four programmes of work across the county, one of which was Adult DIVERT (now called Champions), a police custody intervention programme, to help reduce offending in young adults aged 18-25 years who have been detained for violence. However, as the programme has developed in recent years, it is no longer predicated around police custody and has developed into a community wide offer responding to higher demand in other areas, and is no longer defined as youth (under 18years) & adult (18-25 years), instead developing into a hybrid offer covering the 10-25 age range.<sup>4</sup>

The Champions programme is delivered by nine football club community organisations (CCOs) across Lancashire. It looks to target young people with experience of or at risk of serious violence and adopts a trauma informed approach, to build trusted relationships and deliver innovative interventions which promote personal development, wellbeing gains and consequently reducing their experience of offending / reoffending and antisocial behaviours.

Participation in the programme is voluntary, subject to assessment of suitability, and relies on a positive approach from the mentor, the young person and others involved in the programme. The Champions team (mentors) provide opportunities and activities which help young people achieve their goals. These might include personal and social development, practical help to get job ready, identifying and accessing training opportunities, support into health services and other wrap around care. The programme comes in three easy to understand phases, focusing on progression at the client's pace and achieving objectives set by them. The mentors provide support for as long as required, provided participants are engaging and working positively towards their goals.

<sup>4</sup> Note that this report – ONLY focuses on those clients aged 18+ years

## 2.1 Progress made since the previous report

Significant progress on implementing the recommendations from the previous report has been made. Most notably:

- Communication: regular team meetings between the LVRN team and the Trust mentors have allowed the sharing of best practice between Trusts; quarterly reviews have been established with Trust leads and Mentors; There has been a dedicated website, on the LVRN site, developed to include a stakeholder page
- Trauma Informed practice has been installed as an integral part of the mentor inductions and the philosophy is reiterated in regular one-one meetings with mentors; Build a Better Life programme has been co-developed and implemented across Trusts, placing the client in control of their own objectives
- Data collection: Views for 18+ and U18's programmes have been merged to simplify data recording
- Impact measures: soft outcome measures have been built into the data collection system to help identify participant progression; case studies are now completed throughout the clients time on the programme
- Safeguarding: Mentors are now trained in Trust safeguarding policies; safeguarding added to mentor KPIs

### 3. Evaluation Methods

This qualitative evaluation has been delivered via semi-structured, one-one interviews with:

- Programme mentors, currently delivering Champion's activity with clients aged 18+. All mentors in post at the time received an email invitation to participate in a discussion on the Champions 18+) programme. Responses were received from 5 mentors and interviews booked (n=5)
- Programme participants, with active clients aged 18+. Participants were identified by programme mentors. Participants signed informed consent to interview following which an on-line interview was held using Microsoft Teams. Six participants agreed to interview however only 4 attended the interview (n=4).

The interviews took place between November 2023 – January 2024. And followed a semi-structured interview guide attached in Appendix 1.

The qualitative data was supplemented by secondary analysis of existing participant data. This data is stored on the Champions 'Views' data collection system and was sent to the evaluators in Excel sheets – where any identifiable participant information was removed prior to being received by the evaluator.

#### 3.1 Evaluation limitations

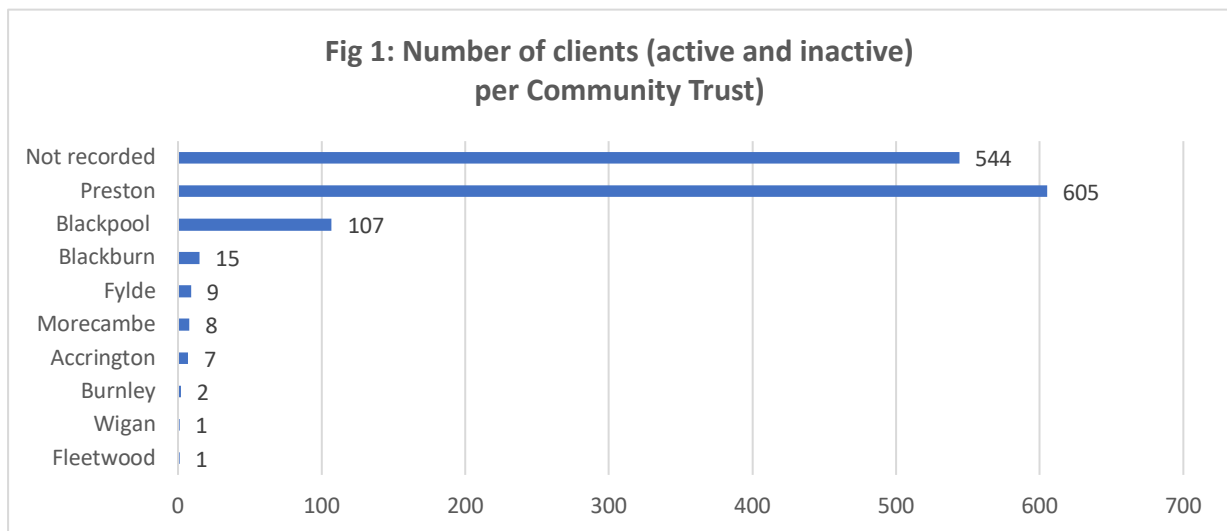
The evaluation was, in the main, retrospective and limited by the availability and reliability of existing participant data. It became apparent to the evaluators, once the secondary data analysis commenced, that a significant amount of collated data was either incomplete or inaccurate. During the period of this evaluation and reporting significant work was taking place in refining the data collection system and these changes have been noted but not reflected in this report.

The evaluation would have benefited through greater access to more active clients and through interviews with past clients/those who dropped out of the programme.

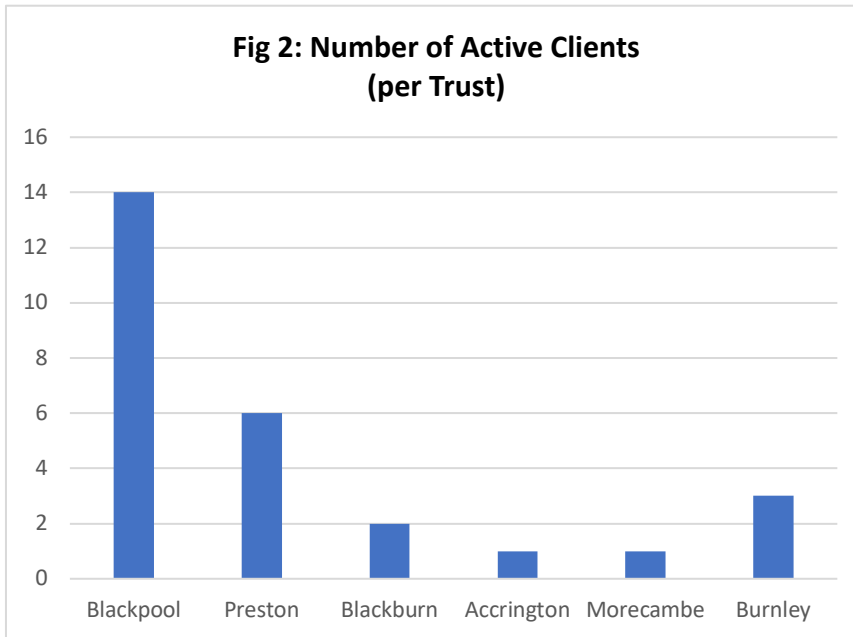
## 4. Champions participants

### 4.1 Participant Output Data

Since the programme commenced (01/01/2020) there have been over 1,300 clients (aged 18+ yrs.) that have received some contact with the programme across nine football Community Trusts. It is of note that 42% (n=544) of clients referred to the programme, were not linked to any Community Trust on the data collection system. The omission was due to it being a non-mandatory field on the Views system, however this has now been addressed to allow more accurate reporting going forwards. Of the remainder, most of those participants (80%. n=605) were linked to Preston North End Community and Education Trust and 14% (n=107) were linked to Blackpool FC Community Trust. Burnley, Wigan and Fleetwood combined were only linked to 4 clients.

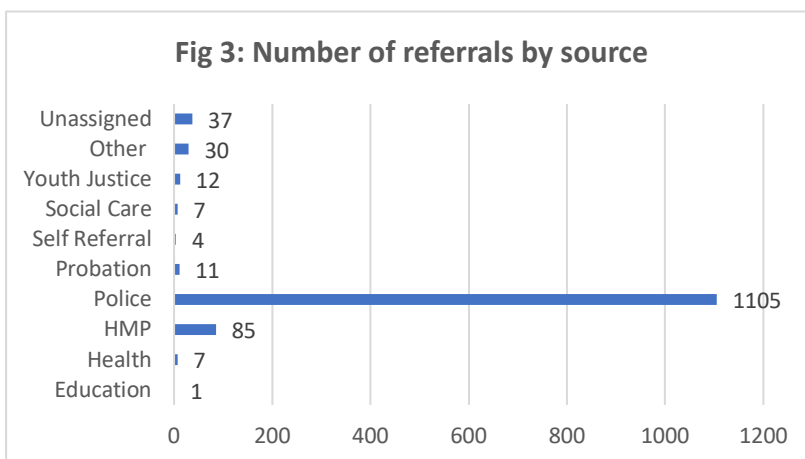


As a result of high demand to support younger clients, there are currently (December 2023) only 27 clients aged 18+ are classed as 'active' on the data collection system. Due to programme providers responding to high demand for support to under 18's These clients are engaged with six of the Football Community Trusts.



The data system appears to have inaccuracies, of those classified as active (figure 2) Burnley and Blackburn Community Trusts have since reported that they have zero 'active' clients – Since completion of this data the system is currently being reviewed to ensure it is a more accurate reflection of the current position.

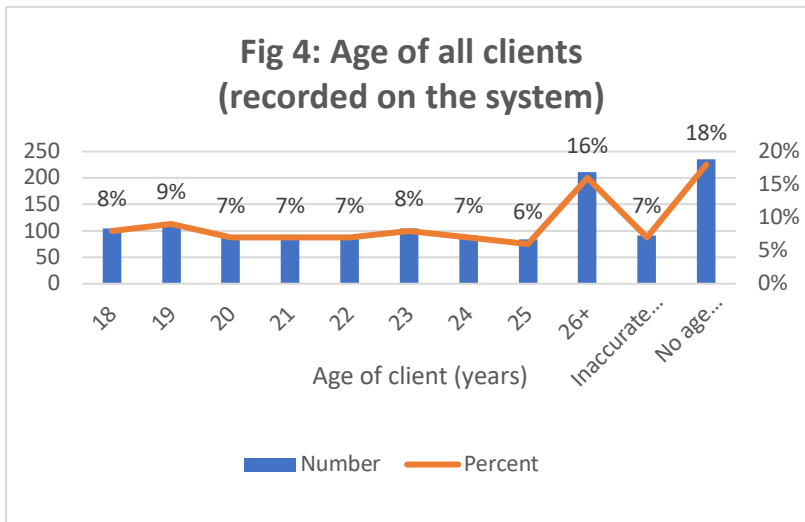
Of the participants recorded as 'inactive' (n=1,279) 27% of were classified as receiving a 'contact letter' but not progressing beyond this point, meaning 345 clients had declined the invitation to take part.



The majority (85%) of referrals onto the programme were made by the police, whilst a further 7% came from Her Majesty's Prisons.

The remaining referrals came from a variety of sources including youth justice, probation, health and social care.



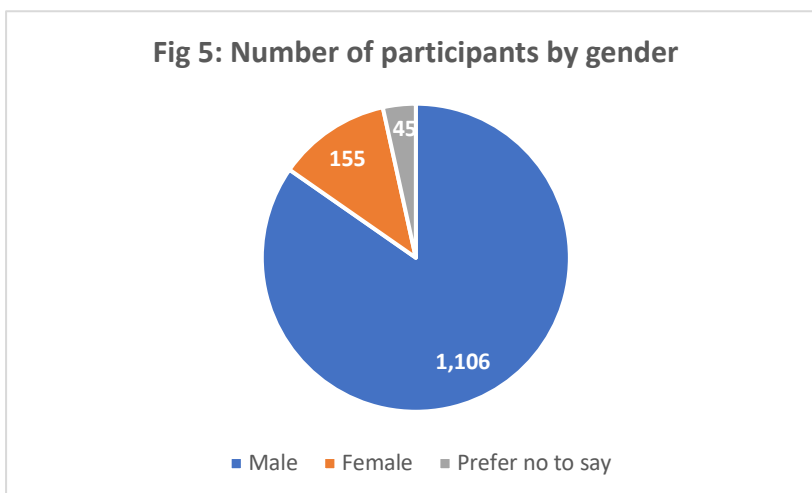


25% of clients registered on the data collection system have either no age (n= 235 clients) or an inaccurate age (n=91 clients) recorded. For many clients the age was not recorded as it was not stated in the referral form. It was reported for example that some of these may be contact letter 'referrals' where initial contact is initiated by the mentor and limited personal information

recorded. This is completed if the young person takes up the support offer.

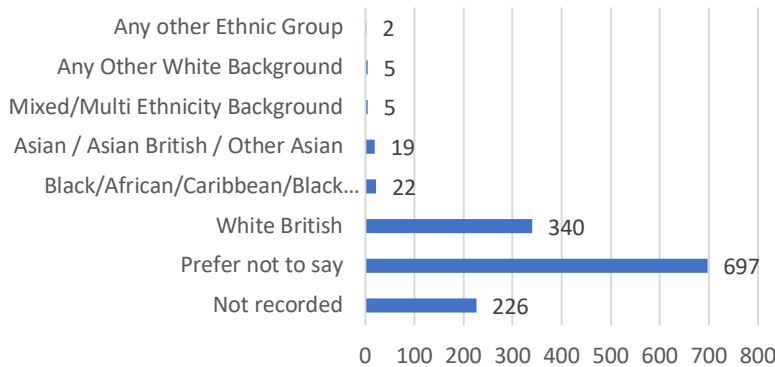
Of the remaining clients, 16% were aged 26+ years (n=210 clients), outside the initial target age group for the programme. However, based on prior learning, it was agreed that the programme could be offered to clients over the age of 25 years who might benefit from the programme.

The remainder, 59% of total referrals (n = 765 clients) were aged within the target age group of 18-25 years. These were, split evenly across the age groups.



The majority (85%) of participants were male with just 12% (n=155 clients) registered as females.

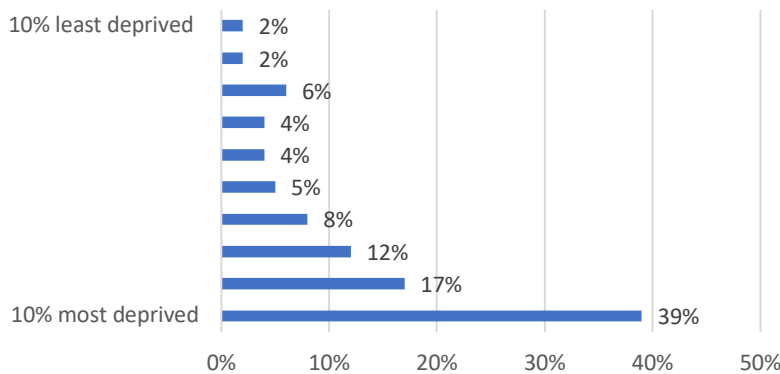
**Fig 6: Number of participants (active and inactive) by ethnicity**



Over half of participants (53%) preferred not to state their ethnicity and a further 17% of participants did not have an ethnicity recorded.

Of those participants stating an ethnicity (n=393 clients) 87% were classified as 'White British'. There has been very little take up to the programme from ethnic minority groups.

**Fig 7: Percent of participants by IMD decile**

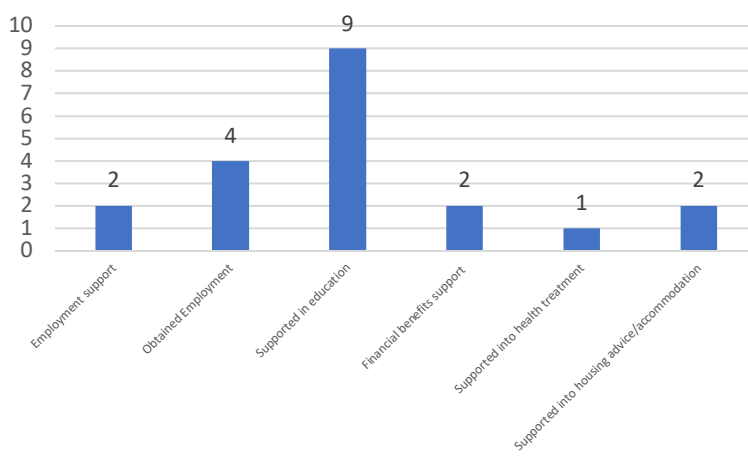


Six in ten referred participants lived in the 20% most deprived wards in the country.

## 4.2 Participant Outcome Data

Assessing participant outcomes from the data collection system has proven to be problematic.

**Fig 8: Number of participants achieving specific outcomes (Feb 2020 - Aug 2023)**



Of the 92 clients aged 18+ that engaged on the programme between February 2022 and August 2023, there are a total of 411 completed outcomes. The majority of these (n=254) are recorded as receiving information, advice and guidance or taking part in Community Trust activities. Whilst the data available to the evaluators at the time did not allow us to investigate beyond these generic headings, it is reported that this is a

system issue rather than a mentor issue. The underlying detail relating to impacts and outcomes is available and can be seen from individual client records and this detail could be included in future client case studies for evaluation purposes. There is significant ongoing work to further refine the data collection system.

## Reoffending

Whilst analysing re-offending data was outside the scope of this evaluation, it was noted that it is one of the key performance indicators (KPIs) of the Champions programme i.e. desistance from entering and/or re-entering the criminal justice system.

To measure this, a small sample of individuals from Champions (n=19) were analysed for reoffending behaviour by the LVRN. Clients had to meet the following criteria:

1. Multiple engagements with a mentor/ coach
2. Last active with the programme 6-12 months ago (evidence-based period for 'cooling off' review)
3. Previous offence (conviction or non-conviction), or offending behaviour i.e. ASB

Of the 19 clients, 5 clients had zero recorded offences prior and post engagement with Champions (this does not mean there was no offending behaviour i.e. ASB). Of the remaining 14 in the sample, 10 desisted from all offending post engagement, and the other 4 reduced in offending. None increased in offending<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> LVRN Annual Report 2024

## 5. Programme Impact - Client Case Studies

### 5.1 Client 1

#### What was the offending history of client prior to the programme?

Prior to engaging on the programme, the client was in regular contact with the police. These troubles were compounded by on-going mental health issues. The client reported that they were frustrated and angry a lot of the time, which led to their negative behaviours. The client had very low confidence and was regularly taking Diazepam.

#### What other support had the client received prior to joining the Champions programme?

Previously the client had been offered support from probation services. They had been assigned a drug worker from an outside agency, who tried to get them onto a treatment programme. Additionally, the client was offered one-one support, however he didn't attend, he did not want to engage with these services.

#### How did the client become engaged with the Champions programme?

The client was in police custody when they were introduced to the mentor four months ago. The mentor discussed the programme with the client and encouraged them to get involved, leaving them a leaflet to help them understand more about what is involved.

*"I don't normally work with or take up support from the police or probation. In the past they have tried to get me to work with so many people, but I have just not done it, I've not wanted to. I wasn't going to sign up to working with this programme either, but the mentor was really positive, so I went once and just stuck to it."*

#### Did the client understand what was involved in the programme at the outset?

The discussion with the mentor and the leaflet the client was given provided sufficient information to understand the support available through the Champions programme. The client recognised that the programme was voluntary rather than mandatory and that it was a self-referral programme, but they wanted to receive the support. The client wanted help, someone who they could trust to talk to confidentially, without the conversations getting back to the police or probation. The client wanted help with getting on to training courses that could lead to employment and they wanted some support with their personal development.

#### What has the client done whilst on the programme and how have the coaches worked with them?

The client and the mentor meet up on a one-one basis in a private, safe place to work around the clients' lack of confidence. The client reports that this support has really helped to give the client confidence to speak up and engage fully in the programme and in their personal life. Together, the client and mentor have worked to put a personal development plan in place, which is broken down into short term goals. Each time they meet they talk through the clients' progress against the goals they agreed.

As a result of the high-quality mentor the client has found the Champions programme useful and mentor very easy to work with.

*"Before meeting with [the mentor] I used to just block stuff out and ignore stuff – thinking that the problem would go away so I didn't have to deal with it. But now, because I've got a plan in place with [The mentor] I know how to*

*go about stuff. I know how to deal with all the problems – you just take them one at a time. Sort out one problem, then sort out another and the issues don't just build up."*

*"When I feel like getting into crime or something, they [the mentor] are there for you to talk to, to support you, to stop you doing the wrong things."*

### **What are your thoughts on the Champions programme?**

The client has really valued the one-one support that the programme offers. If the client has a problem, they simply text the mentor or phone them. The mentor is responsive and meets up straight away. The programme has exceeded the clients' expectations.

*"[The mentor] is the greatest. I struggle with speaking to people but with [the mentor] we just click. He doesn't make you feel uncomfortable, he doesn't make you feel any different to anyone else."*

*"Most people look down on people like us – we are criminals. But on the Champions programme the support team are all there to help me. They understand! So instead of judging us they work with us to put a plan in place."*

### **What are the impacts of you being on the programme?**

The client speaks openly about their struggles with mental health issues and about how the mentor has supported them with their wellbeing. They say this support has been delivered in a better way than any other programme he has been referred to in their past.

*"If I rang up my mentor and said I had a problem with my mental health – it's not good – I'm thinking I'm going to do something. They quickly refer me onto the right support straight away. If it's a mental health person or doctors or whoever they think would be best for that situation. Or they'll come and pick me up or I'll meet them and we will speak through the situation and this puts me in a much better place"*

*"It's [the programme] has got me out of really dark places. The mentor's kept me out of trouble – so respect to them. I'm still here because of them [the mentor]."*

The client highlights the positive impact the programme has had on their confidence to engage with others.

*"In the past, I would just not engage with people. I get proper nervous, but [the mentor] has built up my confidence. Like this interview [with the evaluator]. I would never have done this in the past. This morning I was proper nervous and was going to not do it. So, I rang up [the mentor] and they just built up my confidence and I'm here now speaking to you. That would never have happened in the past."*

The client openly acknowledges that if it were not for the programme, they would probably have been involved in significant criminal activity. They are very open that the programme has steered them away from trouble, both criminal and personal, and helped the client deal with stresses in a positive way.

*"Since I've been working with [the mentor] I've not been arrested, I've not been pulled or stuff like that. I see a different side of life now, if you know what I mean. I wake up every morning and feel happier."*

*"I recently got told some bad news. Normally this would really stress me out but now I just sit down and think about it. There's no point kicking off, it's not going to solve nothing."*

Due to the change in their behaviour, the client now reports that they have developed a really good bond with their mum and that their friends and family know that they have now changed, increasing their social connections.

### **What does your future hold?**

The client is very positive about the future and wants to work in the bicycle repair industry. The mentor has enrolled the client onto related training programmes, which the client is really looking forward to completing before launching their own repair business.

*“So [the mentor] has found me a course to do a qualification and hopefully I want to continue with doing training in bike tech. Then in about 5 years I want to have my own business.”*

## **5.2 Client 2**

### **What was the offending history of client prior to the programme?**

The client reports that they have not been in any ‘serious trouble’ with the police but that they have had significant anger management issues. These issues have led to frequent incidents involving the police having to attend the situation or take the client into custody. The client has reported that they have very low levels of self-esteem, and they report personal mental wellbeing concerns.

*“I’ve not been in proper trouble with the police or anything. But what I do sometimes is, I’ll just go mad. Who knows why I need the police involved. I’ve been threatened with the police many times. Like my mam, she was like, oh, I’m gonna ring the police because she’s disrespecting our property.”*

### **What other support had the client received prior to joining the Champions programme?**

Previously the client had support from a family support worker.

### **How did the client become engaged with the Champions programme?**

The client was referred in to the programme via a family support worker. The support worker asked the client if they would consider getting involved with the Champions programme and the client was receptive to this and was referred on.

### **Did the client understand what was involved in the programme at the outset?**

The client says that they did not really have any idea what the programme was about before they signed up, they signed up because it was suggested they would benefit. However, when the client contacted the programme, they were informed that it was a safe place to be able to talk about issues within their life and to get support that will help them with their personal issues.

### **What has the client done whilst on the programme and how have the coaches worked with them?**

The client and the mentor have worked together to put a personal plan in place. The plan is based on short term goal setting. The client highlights that these goals have been critical to them in supporting the client to manage and control their anger and to develop positive and constructive relationships with friends and family. The client and mentor have worked together on anger management techniques to try and prevent minor issues developing into significant situations.

*“[The mentor] gives me a lot of advice. They gave me some techniques I can use if I feel myself getting mad. Like take deep breaths, counting how many times you breathe in a minute.”*

*“I’ve now started ringing people that know and talking to them about what I’m doing and how I am feeling. Asking if someone can help me through it? They’ll stay on the phone to me for a bit and this really helps.”*

### **What are your thoughts on the Champions programme?**

The client has fully engaged with the programme and enjoys the one-one support offered by the mentor. The two of them meet in the local coffee shop or at the Community Trust office and the client considers these safe and protected spaces.

*“[The mentor] is brilliant, I can tell them what I’ve been up to that week and they give me advice about what I could have done better and tips on how to try and stay calm if you end up in a bad situation.”*

### **What are the impacts of you being on the programme?**

The client speaks about how the programme has improved how they behave at home and with friends and it has led to less interaction with the police.

*“It’s made me into a bit of a better person. It’s helped me get stuff off my chest, it’s helped me to stop bottling things up.”*

The client highlights the positive impact the programme has had on supporting them to join local community clubs and activities. As a result of engaging in the programme the client has committed to doing charity walks and raising funds for pancreatic cancer support. The work with the mentor has significantly increased the client’s confidence. They say that this would not have happened without engagement on the programme.

*“I didn’t really want to go out in the past, but working with [the mentor] was reassuring. They would give me certain tasks to do in different weeks, it stopped me not going out and I’m starting to do more socialising with other people.”*

*“I think it has made me more likable. I mean, I can still have like my ‘mad days’ but I’m becoming a bit nicer with people now.”*

There have been times when safeguarding issues were flagged and the mentor talked through the actions that they were going to follow up on. This conversation helped the client to have confidence in opening to the mentor.

*“There have been times [when safeguarding issues were raised]. But [the mentor] helped me prepare for that. I’ve done it once before where [the mentor] had to tell someone and it made me feel better that I opened up to them and they talked about it with me. I wouldn’t tell my family so I’m glad I managed to talk to someone.”*

### **What does your future hold?**

The client is more positive about the future and is looking to secure employment. The mentor is supporting the client with this and has helped the client access apprentice opportunities in a local early year’s nursery.

### 5.3 Client 3

#### What was the offending history of client prior to the programme?

The client had a history of drugs offences and petty crime and had been in an abusive relationship with an ex-partner. At the time of engaging on the Champions programme the client was under investigation after being arrested and there were issues about the courts freezing the clients bank accounts.

The client reported that at the start of the programme they were at real risk of becoming homeless.

#### What other support had the client received prior to joining the Champions programme?

The client has an assigned social worker and a mental health advisor.

#### How did the client become engaged with the Champions programme?

The client had been arrested for drugs offences. Whilst under investigation they received a letter from the Community Trust inviting them onto the programme. The client's mental health advisor recommended the client to not attend the Champions programme because they were dealing with significant levels of stress and anxiety and the mental health advisor thought the Champions programme would add to the stress. Despite this advice the client contacted the programme, and they arranged an initial meet up to chat about the programme.

*"He [mental health advisor] actually said don't get involved with the programme. He said it might add on to the stress I'm dealing with already. But I just had a gut feeling I should contact [the mentor], so I rang them up."*

This conversation reassured the client and she agreed to continue with the programme.

#### Did the client understand what was involved in the programme at the outset?

The approach made by the Community Trust (through a written letter), was initially viewed negatively, in that the client thought they were in more trouble. However, on reading the material the client said that the letter provided sufficient information to trigger a positive response from the client. The client talked about how easy it was to contact the mentor and how responsive the mentor was in replying to the contact. At the outset the client did not really know what she expected to gain from the programme but went to the first meeting with an open mind.

*"I wanted to find out what this programme could do for me and how it could help me and then I would make a decision on if I wanted to continue."*

The client really valued the opportunity for this informal meet up, to discuss what was involved. This created a safe space for the client to discuss and understand what the programme was about.

*"It was nice to have that initial first meeting with [the mentor], because I initially thought the letter was like, 'I'm getting in trouble'. But when they sat me down, I realised it was more about me, whatever I need from them. So, whether it's like employment or education or just little things that you need help with day to day, or even just a general chat."*



### What has the client done whilst on the programme and how have the coaches worked with them?

The client has weekly meetings with the mentor, often in locations such as the local coffee shop. The client prefers these locations because they see them as more informal than traditional workplaces or offices. The conversations at the 'meet ups' tend to focus on issues that have been stressing the client that week and they discuss coping mechanisms to manage these stresses.

*"I've been stressed because I'm under investigation after being arrested. Going forward I hope I can continue to meet the mentor because it's improved my mental health."*

As a result of the support, the client has enrolled on the Prince's Trust – which provides positive activity on Mondays to Friday each week. Engagement with Champions has helped provide motivation and support that encourages the client to continue this programme, without the mentors support they would most likely have dropped out.

*"I was unsure if I wanted to get involved in the Prince's Trust programme. But when [the mentor] contacted people, they knew at the Prince's Trust their advice was that they think it would be good for me. So I went, I still go!"*

Whilst the client is not yet able to address employment or education issues, they are clearly focused on addressing these, as their mental health continues to improve.

### What are your thoughts on the Champions programme?

The client has really engaged with the programme and enjoys the one-one support offered by the mentor.

*"As soon as I met [the mentor] I felt really comfortable around them, that I could talk to them about anything that I'm stressed about or anything on my mind."*

*"I don't have family so when people I trust give me advice, I take it into account. It's like 'Ok if [the mentor] is telling me something, giving me advice, I take it quite seriously. If they tell me it will be good for me, like joining Princes Trust, then I might as well give it a go."*

### What are the impacts of you being on the programme?

The client speaks about how the programme has significantly improved their mental wellbeing. It has helped the client remain engaged with other support networks including staying in contact with their social worker.

*"I've got a new social worker and I don't really like her. So, I tell my mentor about her and why I don't trust her. The mentor encourages me to give her time to stick with her – that she is there to help me. I would have stopped seeing the social worker if it wasn't for this programme"*

The Champions programme has supported the client in settling in a new flat and re-engaging with previous activities that the client used to enjoy before they started getting into trouble with authorities – positive activities such as reading, walking, cycling and joining the gym.

*"Meeting the mentor really helps me. It gives me sanity. It makes me feel like 'OK I can write stuff down, that's on my mind, and stuff I need help with and then I'll discuss it with them, and they will help me work through it."*

The client mentions that their engagement on the programme has kept them out of more trouble with the police.

*“There was a point where they [the police] closed my bank account. My benefits went into this account, so I could not access my benefits. The police are the ones that went to court to say they want to freeze it for 6-months to do investigations. So, I couldn’t pay for my rent and my bills and my food, so I’m stressed about that. I remember just saying to my mentor on this programme, it would be so easy for me to do what I used to do [crime], because the police had blocked my account and I needed money. But [my mentor] told me it is not worth it – she has really helped me stay out of trouble.”*

It has also helped her to keep away from her abusive ex-partner.

*“I told [the mentor] that I was talking to him [abusive ex-partner]. [The mentor] gave me advice, like don’t waste time, you deserve better. They said if you think back to when all the stuff started, like my addiction in the past and getting arrested for it all. It all started from my ex-partner. So [the mentor] reminded me of all that and I was like ‘that’s so true’”*

### **What does your future hold?**

Before the client engaged on the programme the client depressed, not wanting to get out of bed, but says that the programme has given them the motivation, given them direction and personal accountability.

*“Why should I bother with my life. What have I got to look forward to? I’m going to get locked away in jail for years. Why should I even bother with my life.”*

But now having the constant support of the mentor the client now looks forwards and not backwards

*“What do I enjoy doing? Nobody has asked me that question in such a long time. So, when [the mentor] asked me that, I had to sit and think about what I used to like – its reminded me to try and do those things again like reading and cooking and baking and stuff.”*

Going forward the client wants to continue to meet with the mentor and is on a waiting list for therapy for her mental health and addictions. The client is looking to write a CV to enable her to gain new skills and employment, ideally as a firefighter following an introduction to firefighting they received at the Prince’s Trust. Another option the client is considering is going back to university to complete her travel and tourism degree – a degree they started prior to their involvement in crime.

## **5.4 Client 4**

### **What was the offending history of client prior to the programme?**

The client says that they were ‘all over the place’ in their life, living a classic ‘chaotic’ life. They were regularly carrying a knife, persistently getting angry, and frequently fighting with family and others across their community. The client says that they wanted help but that they did not know where to go to get that help. Immediately prior to joining the programme, the client had been arrested after the police were called to a violent incident.

**What other support had the client received prior to joining the Champions programme?**

The client reports that prior to joining the Champions programme they had not received any help from any other external agencies.

**How did the client become engaged with the Champions programme?**

The client has been on the programme for 6-months. They were directly referred to Champions by the police following the client's arrest. They state that within a couple of weeks of this referral they had been contacted by the Champions mentor. The support offered sounded like the type of support the client thought he required and so agreed to have an exploratory meeting with the mentor.

**Did the client understand what was involved in the programme at the outset?**

The client received a letter directly from the mentor when he was referred. He says this gave him enough information about the programme to encourage him to have an original meeting and following this meeting they were really encouraged that the programme was what they needed.

*"When I got the letter, I sat there thinking about it – should I go? should I not? I ended up thinking if I do this it will be beneficial for me so I should at least give it a go."*

The client says that they really wanted someone to have confidential conversations with, where they could talk openly without the information being passed back to the police or to 'authorities. They also wanted help with CV's and applying for jobs and they wanted support with finding opportunity to do training and educational courses on-line.

**What has the client done whilst on the programme and how have the coaches worked with them?**

The client meets with the mentor for an hour each week. Most of these sessions are spent on personal development conversations, coping mechanisms and tools for managing anger. They have recently started to build additional sessions into the programme with the wider Community Trust team and are taking part in football sessions with others working with the Trust.

*"There's some football sessions on a Friday that have been brilliant"*

**What are your thoughts on the Champions programme?**

The client has really embraced the programme and talks about the 'amazing' help he is receiving '*when no one has helped him in the past.*'

*"The mentor has spent a lot of time working on my wellbeing and stuff, and teaching me ways to keep calm, not get angry and stuff"*

*"I've been working on my CV. Updating it, getting myself in a good position to apply for jobs."*

The client talks openly about the challenge presented by being on the programme, acknowledging that this is about challenging himself to come and participate and be pro-active with his life.

*"I phone the mentor. I say this is a hard thing, a tough time for me. I don't know what to do. Can I come and talk to you [the mentor]? They are always happy to meet me straight away – to help me and keep me out of trouble. I had an interview with the police last week and the mentor came along, supported me and helped me through it."*

The client talks about how helpful the programme has been and that they strongly recommend it to other people in the same position.

### **What are the impacts of you being on the programme?**

The client is now on paid employment, working in a warehouse picking and packing for home delivery orders. Prior to this his only income was universal credit, so they now say they are in a much more stable financial position and living a much more positive life.

The client talks about the coping mechanisms that they have gained through being on the programme – how they now go out for walks around the park when they feel themselves getting agitated or getting angry.

*“I don’t know what I would have done without this programme. I would definitely have been in the same place as was before, probably in jail.”*

*“I don’t want to get in trouble no more with the police.”*

*“The mentor has helped me a lot, they really have, and I thank them for that.”*

### **What does your future hold?**

Looking forward to the future the client talks about how they would like to become a mentor, to work with the Community Trust. They would like to support other people who are in the same place as they were when they joined the programme. They want to help others overcome their ‘issues’.

The client suggests that the adults going through the programme should be given an opportunity to go out and meet young people who are heading towards crime and talk to them about what they are doing, and show them there are other more positive choices.

*“We should go out to parks at night. You have young kids all around causing a bit of trouble, violence. So maybe we could approach them and have a chat with them and say we’ve come from where you are, been through this programme and we want to help you.”*

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Impact

The evaluation has clearly highlighted within this report that when clients (aged 18+ yrs.) engage proactively with the Champions programme the impacts and outcomes achieved can be significant and far-reaching, beyond the criminal justice system and across society. As evaluators, we found the client case study discussions inspirational and feel they bring to life exactly what can be achieved by one-one supportive programmes such as Champions.

Whilst wider outcome data (as recorded on the programmes data collection system) is limited, it highlights the potential to achieve the key outcomes relating to avoidance of reoffending, progress through to education, training and employment and the ability to support clients to receive the wider support they require though health care, social care and housing.

### 6.2 Reach

The programme has received nearly one and a half thousand referrals in just 3 years of operation. This demonstrates a significant need for this programme. However, there are fewer than 30 active clients with only four of the nine Community Trusts currently working with adult clients, with just two Trusts accounting for most of these. This is not due to a lack of willingness by Trusts to work with adult clients. Rather, discussions with mentors suggested that external agencies (e.g. HMP, probation, health and social care etc) are simply not referring clients or that clients are not taking up the offer resented to them.

The mentors highlight that on the isolated occasions when agencies do refer adult clients, the clients often do not take up the offer of support. These statements from mentors are supported by the data which indicates that around a third of clients receiving an initial 'contact letter' do not attend the first session. Perhaps this provides an opportunity to review the written and verbal information provided to the client on referral.

### 6.3 Referral agencies

Whilst the data highlights a broad range of referral partners, most (85%) referrals onto the programme arrive via the police service. Interestingly when cross referencing to current 'active' clients. When looking at the referral source of clients currently active (n=32) only 40% of these active clients came via a police referral, with 16% coming from probation service referral and 9% via social care referrals. When exploring inactive clients there were 55% (n=611) of police referrals that went no further than distribution of a contact letter. It is reported that the contact letter is used as a promotion tool, and it is reported that it is effective in relation to being a low-cost approach which doesn't '*tie up too much mentor time*'. It is recognised that clients responding to the contact letter are generally doing so when they're ready to engage with the programme. The apparent ineffectiveness of the contact letter approach may be distorted by the client status being changed by clients responding to contact letters

who the programme subsequently works with, as the status on the record changes to 'active', then 'inactive' once they disengage. However, the low conversion rates perhaps suggest that this method of contacting police referrals is not the most effective in motivating clients to take up the offer.

In interviews with the mentors who have active client lists, the majority suggest that the most effective referrals came, in the main, via attendance at the police custody suites, but it was recognised that this was a difficult environment for some mentors to be in.

*“So, you go through the process of identifying those that meet the criteria and then going speaking to them while they are in custody. I experienced a lot of issues whilst doing that. Because they [the custody suites] weren't always the most welcoming.”*

It is also of note that mentors visiting police custody suites is not seen as the most effective use of the mentor's time, since demand is speculative. The programme therefore developed the community offer to reduce time spent in custody waiting for clients. All the mentors are now hybrid, supporting adult and youth clients based on demand.

Mentors suggest that there is a need to raise awareness of the programme across a broader spectrum of agencies and suggest a communication plan needs to be established / re-visited at an LVRN and local level.

*“I'm not actually sure that agencies know the about the programme. They obviously have loads of organisations that support those entering the (criminal justice) system and I think they just stick with the 4 mainstream ones.”*

## 6.4 Programme recruitment

When exploring why adult clients are not feeding through to the programme, some mentors suggest that there is not much adult crime (suitable for referral) taking place in their locality – especially compared to the larger authorities of Blackpool and Preston which receive most referrals. Whilst clearly the areas of Blackpool and Preston do have the highest incidents of violent crime, there are still significant issues in all nine targeted areas.

It would appear logical that there could be a lack of awareness of the Champions programme availability amongst referral agencies in the inactive areas and that further marketing and promotion is required in these areas.

The lack of adult referrals is compounded by competing priorities for delivery of the under-18's programme. The high number of U18's is highlighting capacity issues, with waiting lists for Under 18's growing, and currently new referrals (across the age range) are being held on waiting lists for most Trusts. Therefore, if there is greater marketing and promotion of the over 18's programme it could raise demand and capacity issues for some programmes. Promoting the programme, whilst necessary in some respects, creates more demand which the programme may struggle to service and thus lead to dissatisfaction amongst referrers and clients.

Finally, it is reported that recruitment of 18+ age group has been negatively affected by a high turnover of mentors during the past 12-months, which is reported as being to temporary contracts and mentor progression.

*“I picked this up from a colleague a few months ago and there were no active clients on the system. I’ve not been able to recruit adults since.”*

*“When I made the transition (from Youth Mentor to Adult Mentor) I continued with my youth clients because they were already heavily engaged with me – so it made sense to keep them.”*

The evidence, gathered through the programme, has steered the programme away from custody and demonstrated that the adult offer doesn’t have the same traction as work with under 18s. It is reported that, going forward, the programme will, in the main, focus on under 18s but will continue to support older young people if they showed requisite motivation.

## 6.5 Early programme withdrawal

A significant majority of the ‘Inactive Clients’ are registered on the data system, as having the date of their ‘first visit’ the same date as the date of the ‘last visit’. This suggests that most ‘inactive’ clients drop out immediately following the first meeting. However, this may not be the case. It is possible that they may not have had a ‘first session’. Many of the ‘inactive’ clients who are recorded as having progressed no further than a contact letter also has a ‘first session’ and ‘last session’ date recorded as the same. This raises inconsistencies in data inputting and requires a deeper review.

In discussing why, out of nearly one and a half thousand adult clients there are so few still active on the system, mentors talked the difficult in sustaining relationships. They highlight the transient nature of 18+ clients, coupled with often chaotic lifestyles. The programme is voluntary not compulsory – so it is easy for clients to stop attending as other life-issues arise.

*“The Blackpool mentor got in touch, saying this individual was in Blackpool and homeless. But it turned out this individual, his past and his base was in Fylde – so he got in touch with us. We spoke to the individual and he was engaging on the phone with us and happy to meet, but the day later he was moving to Fleetwood and so was like thanks but no thanks.”*

## 6.6 Participant data collection

Significant resource has been directed to recording client output and outcome data, which has been made readily available to this evaluation. This is to be applauded as, too often, data collection and evaluation is squeezed out of programmes and without this data it would be impossible to assess value.

The Champions programme uses the ‘Views – Substance’ data collection system. The system requires the individual mentors to input client output and outcome data for each client. The system can then produce a standard set of reports. During this evaluation we have found gaps and inconsistencies in the data recording, making accurate analysis problematic. These inconsistencies have included:

- Inaccuracies for example incorrect inputting of age, (many clients were aged just 1 year old for an example). It is reported that in some cases, rather than being inputted inaccurately, mentors entered erroneous ages intentionally because DOB was a mandatory field, and the accurate DOB was not known. It is reported that this issue has since been resolved.
- Data omissions including very little data gathered on ethnicity of client or disability data; a significant number of clients not assigned to any Community Trust or simply assigned to LVRN. It is reported that some of these will be 'test' clients used for training purposes as mentors learn how to use the system and that they have not been deleted from the system following training.
- Outcome duplication for example 'Community Trust Activities' or 'Information Guidance and Advice' can be reported as outcomes multiple times for the same client. It is reported that during the course of a normal support plan clients will achieve multiple outcomes under the same category. They might also achieve multiple outcomes during one session

It is encouraging that the issues have been recognised by LVRN and that significant work is taking place to address many technical issues, with data work-arounds to:

- Summarise and present data for nine Trusts across five key reporting areas.
- Improve quality and consistency in reporting across all Trusts.
- Identify geographical differences.
- Measure quality and performance.

As such, systems are now in place to check if the client is 'active' (the mentor has been in contact with client in last 4 weeks), check the active client is attending sessions and working towards an agreed outcome, check key media documentation uploaded e.g. Referral Form, Risk Assessment. Given the experiences in developing this evaluation – now maybe an appropriate time to consider the type of data being collated to ensure it is both pragmatic for the data inputters and useable by the service evaluators.

## 6.7 Summary

There is clear demand and need for the LVRN Adult Champions Programme as evidenced by the nearly one and half thousand referrals onto the programme in its first three years of operation. There is significant opportunity to enhance the referral process' both in terms of referral agencies and methods of first contact.

When a client fully commits to the programme the outcome indicator measures, enhanced by the client case studies, demonstrate the breadth and depth of impact that the programme is having on clients. This data suggests a need to ensure a greater number of referrals commit longer term to the programme. This is currently being addressed through the implementation of the reward programme and 'Build a Better Life'.

Finally, the programme is making significant efforts to record and analyse data and efforts must continue in order to fully evidence the impact of the programme moving forwards.



## 7. Recommendations

- When clients fully engage with the programme it is effective and a highly valued programme. This evaluation suggests that there is significant potential in continuing investment with a focus on the Adult Champions programme.
- There is a significant gap between the number of clients receiving a contact letter and the numbers attending the first session. Whilst new leaflets were produced in April 2023 (prior to this evaluation), this evaluation suggests that there is an opportunity to redesign the written information to clients given on referral. This should be co-produced by commissioners, mentors and active clients, best placed to understand what information is required. It is encouraging that the Champions Team have already started work on this recommendation, for example a website was developed in 2023, with the aim of improving information available to clients on referral and programme.
- In many areas the adult programme is facing very low numbers of adult referrals. It would be helpful to consider how promotion of the programme to relevant local agencies can be enhanced via a communications strategy.
- It appears that the majority of programme drop out occurs at week one. The programme would benefit from a facilitated group discussion to explore this in more detail and co-create additional early programme methods to test.
- There are inconsistencies in data collection by mentors, some are system related, others are professional development related. Now is the opportune time to use this evaluation to commence an evaluation workshop with mentors – re-visit/re-design the outcome framework – what the system needs to measure and what is required if mentors are to make the data more complete. This will be explored further as part of the subsequent Champions under 18's evaluation.
- Linked to the previous bullet, it is clear from mentor interviews and from the case studies that mental ill-health / mental wellbeing is a significant underlying issue facing many clients. It could be appropriate to consider mental wellbeing measures as key outcomes for this programme and recorded change using a validated tool.
- To continue to develop the evaluation methodology for the programme. The work of the mentors is fairly complex and is difficult to capture fully through data/surveys/interviews. Ongoing evaluation may benefit through observational analysis, to capture some of the nature of the work and impact. There also remains a wider perception amongst some stakeholders that mentors are there to handhold or engage clients in physical activities, possibly due to the affiliation with Football Trusts – some observational insights may help to diffuse this misconception.
- There is significant learning to be gained from this evaluation. It should be widely disseminated and presented to key internal and external agencies.

## Appendix 1. Client Interview Discussion Guide

### Interview topic guide: How does DIVERT support people in Lancashire? A qualitative study of clients' experiences

Questions for guidance, followed by possible prompts against bullet points. The schedule organised according to Normalisation Process Theory (NPT) Framework (NPT component in bold).

#### Introduction checklist

- ✓ Provide a brief description of the purpose of the research, interview format and estimated duration
- ✓ Confirm consent to participate, consent to record, and right to withdraw. If no consent form returned, read aloud consent form and ask participant to agree/ disagree to each item by saying *yes* or *no* RECORD THIS PROCESS.
- ✓ Ask participant if they have any questions before the discussion starts

#### Questions and prompts

- ✓ Ask participant how long they have been involved in DIVERT/Champions programme or working with the coach to inform your interview questions

#### **Coherence: Understanding of the aims and objectives of DIVERT**

1. Please describe how you were told about the Divert/Champions programme?
  - Who told you about DIVERT/Champions?
  - What did you understand about why you were referred?
2. What did you think the DIVERT/Champions programme was about when you were first told about it?
  - What would happen if you said yes to being referred to DIVERT/Champions??
  - What did you think it would be like?
  - What did you think you would have to do??

#### **Cognitive Participation – Acceptance/conceptualisation of changes / new approaches/ DIVERT and coaches' role**

3. What did you think when you first met the coach?
  - What were they going to do for you?
  - How were they going to do it?
  - Did you like them?
4. How did it match with what you expected?
  - Have you ever been in any other programmes? If so, can you compare with DIVERT/Champions?
  - Was it better/ worse/ similar? In what ways?

#### **Collective action: The work done to implement DIVERT approach**

5. What did you have to do on the DIVERT/Champions programme?
  - How did you find that? Difficult/ easy?
  - Can you tell me about something you enjoyed and/or found challenging?
6. How did the DIVERT/Champions coaches work with you?
  - Can you give any examples about something they did that you found particularly useful? Was there anything they did that you found unhelpful?
  - Were there any other people or organisations working with you? What did they do?

7. What benefits or disadvantages were there to being on the DIVERT/Champions programme/ working with the coach?

- Can/ did you apply anything you learned from the programme in your day to day life? Please can you give an example/s?
- What was the most helpful thing you got from the programme/ the coach/ another organisation

#### **Reflexive Monitoring: Reflections on how DIVERT is working in practice**

8. Did/ is being involved with the DIVERT programme/ coach help/ helping you avoid getting arrested/ cautioned/ caught up in violence again?

- If so, how/ why?
- If not, is there anything they could have done differently/ better?

9. Has being involved with DIVERT/ coach impacted on your life in other ways, either positively or negatively?

- How? Can you give an example/s?
- What is the most important thing that has happened as a result of being involved in DIVERT/ working with your coach?
- Has anyone else benefited or been affected?

10. Looking back, what was the most important thing a DIVERT coach or the programme can do to help a client?

- Friendly, supportive chat, be likable
- Trauma-informed approach e.g. not being seen as “bad person”, acceptance, non-judgemental
- Signposting to other organisations
- New skills/ education/ training

#### **Conclusion**

- Is there anything further that you would like to add or think we have missed?

#### **Debrief checklist**

- Thank for participation in the interview and summarise again the research/next steps
- Check participants are happy with the interview and for any wellbeing issues. Email debrief sheet. If any concerns get in touch with your line manager, Heather or Paula.