

Stay Connected: Newport Evaluation

Executive Summary, September 2024¹

This Executive Summary includes the key findings from a more in-depth report conducted by Black Box Research and Consultancy evaluating Stay Connected: Newport.

Key Findings

- **Increased Collaboration:** 70% of participants reported improved collaboration after engaging in Stay Connected, leading to stronger partnerships and knowledge exchange.
- **Enablers of Success:**
 - **Facilitator-Focused:** Joe and Carlus were commended for adapting sessions to meet participants' needs, facilitating strong partnerships.
 - **Participant-Focused:** The involvement of committed individuals was key to the programme's success, fostering a sense of community spirit.
 - **Programme-Focused:** The focus on Newport's specific challenges helped align participants around common goals.
- **Barriers Identified:**
 - Absence of school staff limited the effectiveness of the action plans.
 - Lack of youth representation restricted the programme's ability to fully address youth violence from their perspective.
 - High staff turnover within agencies disrupted partnership continuity.

Project Connect

Project Connect was founded in 2021 with the objective of fostering meaningful connections to help develop strategic vision and mission by leveraging the expertise of individuals in both statutory and third-sector. This is achieved through Project Connect's 'Get Connected' and 'Stay Connected' programmes, both of which have been implemented in Newport.

Evaluation Overview

The Stay Connected: Newport programme was initiated as a continuation of the successful Get Connected programme. Running from July 2023 to April 2024, the programme aimed to maintain and expand collaboration between various stakeholders involved in youth violence prevention in the Newport area of Middlesbrough. The programme focused on building sustained relationships, updating action plans (the SAYVE plan), and ensuring accountability for agreed-upon actions.

A mixed-methods evaluation approach was used, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The evaluation team conducted surveys and interviews with a sample of 10 participants, who represented a range of stakeholders, including police, the local authority, education and third-sector organisations. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes, enablers, barriers, and recommendations for future improvement.

Recommendations

1. **Incorporate Youth Voices:** Actively involve young people in both the design and delivery of the programme to ensure relevance and sustainability.
2. **Enhance School Engagement:** Increase school participation by adjusting session schedules and assigning community liaisons to schools.
3. **Strengthen Stakeholder Engagement:** Mitigate the impact of staff turnover by encouraging broader departmental participation.
4. **Sustained Facilitator Support:** Continue facilitator involvement post-programme to maintain momentum and guide action plan implementation.

¹ This report was prepared by Dr Grace Robinson, Jack Pippard and Daniel Robinson from Black Box Research and Consultancy. The evaluation was funded by Cleveland Police.

Findings

The Stay Connected programme demonstrated significant success in fostering collaboration and building trust among local stakeholders.

Facilitator Impact

The programme's facilitators, Joe and Carlus, were widely praised by participants for their ability to adapt the sessions to the needs of the group. Their neutrality was also a key factor, as it allowed for open, honest discussions without fear of bias. The facilitators were able to create an inclusive environment that encouraged participants to share their experiences and perspectives freely. This, in turn, led to more productive sessions, where participants could identify common challenges and work together to find solutions.

Programme Focus

The programme's focus on the specific challenges facing Newport was another major enabler of success. Participants felt that the hyperlocal nature of Stay Connected helped align their objectives, as the issues being discussed were directly relevant to their work. By focusing on Newport, the programme was able to address the unique factors contributing to youth violence in the area, such as housing issues and anti-social behaviour.

Barriers

Despite the programme's successes, several barriers limited its overall impact. The absence of school staff was repeatedly mentioned as a significant challenge. Schools are often the first to identify vulnerable or at-risk youth, and their perspectives are essential in shaping effective violence prevention strategies. The lack of youth involvement was another notable barrier. Without direct input from young people, the programme missed an opportunity to capture the lived

experiences of those most affected by youth violence.

Finally, staff turnover was identified as a significant barrier to sustained collaboration. Several participants noted that relationships built during Stay Connected often became ineffective when key individuals left their roles. This disrupted the continuity of partnership efforts and limited the programme's long-term sustainability.

Outcomes

Despite these challenges, the programme delivered several positive outcomes. Participants reported an increase in collaboration and knowledge exchange, with many noting that the programme altered their perspectives on key issues, particularly around the intersection of youth violence, housing and anti-social behaviour. The programme also facilitated new professional relationships that had not previously existed, enabling more coordinated efforts across different sectors.

Conclusion

The Stay Connected: Newport programme successfully strengthened collaboration among stakeholders involved in youth violence prevention. The programme's facilitators played a crucial role in fostering a safe and inclusive environment where participants could openly share their experiences and perspectives. However, the absence of key stakeholders, such as school staff and young people, limited the programme's ability to fully address the root causes of youth violence. To build on the successes of Stay Connected, future iterations of the programme should focus on addressing these barriers by increasing the involvement of schools and young people, mitigating the impact of staff turnover, and providing sustained support from facilitators. By implementing these recommendations, Stay Connected can continue to deliver meaningful, long-term outcomes for the Newport community.