



# Enterprise FOR Employment Project

Concluding Evaluation Report (31/1/23)

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## Foreword

The Commission on Gangs and Violence Report was written by Reverend Doctor Carver Anderson and published in November 2017. The Report included a recommendation to deliver an interdisciplinary business hub. The Enterprise to Employment Project ('the Project') was a direct response to that recommendation.

The Project is consistent with key themes in my Police and Crime Plan ('my Plan'). Firstly, prevention; because the prevention of crime is always better than having to deal with the consequences of crime. Secondly, partnership; because no matter how effective policing is, it cannot prevent, tackle and reduce crime all on its own. Thirdly, rehabilitation; because that will mean less crime and less victims of crime.

My Plan includes a pledge to support and expand the Project. That is because it is consistent with the key themes in my Plan. This evaluation forms a clear foundation on which to, not only continue to support the Project, but to expand it across the West Midlands. I aim to do that during the course of my remaining tenure as Police and Crime Commissioner.

The Enterprise to Employment service uses a place, then train model, to support people in Birmingham, with violent convictions, who are aged 18-35, from where they are at in their job hunt, to where they want to be, together with an individual placement support model. The project uses the success metric of ensuring that people keep their jobs for a prolonged period. The focus is not just that they get a job, but that they keep their job.

Using this approach, the project has seen people turn their lives around. This includes people who would otherwise have been likely to have had further interaction with the criminal justice system, due to a history of violent offending. As this report comprehensively sets out, Enterprise to Employment has saved the tax payer a significant amount of money.

However, the fundamental benefit of the project, is that it has provided people with the opportunity to make a positive contribution to society, not only for the benefit of that individual, but also for the benefit of their families, the local community and the greater good of society as a whole.

I record my commendation and give my thanks to: Ronald Winch for conducting this evaluation and to the wider team at Birmingham City University for sponsoring it; Avril Grant and the team at AVision, for their tireless commitment and hard work in making this project a success; and the Steering Group, who have guided this project over the past few years, with specific thanks to Andy Caulton of Hope Energy, who has chaired this group.

I look forward to continuing my support for and expanding the Project; to prevent and tackle crime; promote rehabilitation; change lives; and make a positive difference; for the benefit of the people and communities of the West Midlands.

**Simon Foster**  
**Police and Crime Commissioner**

## 1.0 Introduction

This concluding report completes the independent evaluation of the Enterprise for Employment project and follows the interim report from March 2022.

Tackling violent crime forms a substantial element in the Police and Crime Plan for the West Midlands 2021- 25. In September 2020, after a competitive tendering process, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Midlands appointed, AVision for Empowerment CIC, a not-for-profit organisation, to undertake a project of work with men and women referred with violent crime convictions. The Police and Crime Commissioner for West Midlands allocated £200,000 for the project, to run over two years. As the Enterprise for Employment project established itself over the first 12 months- and it is worthy of comment that this coincided with the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic- considerable evidence emerged of the project's capability to transform lives and reduce re-offending. Therefore, a further £100,000 was invested by the PCC for the financial year 2022-23, with another £100,000 allocated for 2023-24. Thus, bringing total funding of £400,000 up to March 2024.

The project's terms of reference include coaching, mentoring, and supporting offenders over the age of 18 into employment and enterprise. There is also strong evidence that training and learning opportunities have also been developed to the benefit of Service-Users. Since the launch of the programme, Service-Users have been referred from a range of agencies including the National Probation Service, West Midlands Police and Birmingham Multi Agency Gangs Unit (MAGU). The operational aims of the programme involved the resettlement and rehabilitation of offenders, the reduction in violent crime, including the harms caused by violence, reduced re-offending, and the stabilisation of often chaotic lives. The aim of this report is to conclude the independent evaluation, comment on the qualities of the project, highlight the successes and learning outcomes and assess value for money for the PCC. Recommendations are also provided in terms of supporting the work of the project going forwards and how the Enterprise for Employment model can be expanded across the West Midlands Police force area.



## 1.1. IPS Model and BEST

BEST is the concept title for the Enterprise for Employment work undertaken by AVision and stands for '**Breakthrough Enterprise Skills Training.**' The small team at AVision, led by Avril Grant, further consists of an administration function with experienced and accredited caseworkers, coaches, and mentors. BEST seeks to apply the established Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model principles (<https://ipsgrow.org.uk/about/>, 2023), in facilitating Service-Users into paid and meaningful work or business start-up opportunities. Support also applies in enabling Service-Users to benefit from training and education to further increase opportunities in employment and life chances. The IPS model was originally designed and developed to improve the employability and life chances of people suffering from mental health and addiction issues. The model can equally be framed to support veterans, people with physical health issues and prison leavers (<https://ipsgrow.org.uk/about/>, 2023). IPS has a strong evidence base within a number of countries for enabling Service -Users to achieve competitive employment. Within the UK, up to July 2021, Service-Users on IPS schemes gained a 22% competitive employment rate compared to 12% for those who were not on IPS schemes (<https://ipsworks.org/index.php/what-is-ips/>, 2023). My evaluation firmly supports that AVision applies the following eight principles of IPS.

1. The Service-User is integrated into the team (this is evidenced through bespoke intervention measures that meet the Service-User's needs)
2. Competitive employment
3. Job search is rapid- within 30 days
4. The Service-User decides when it's the right time to return to work
5. Employment specialists are engaged within the team to support a job search that is Service-User centred
6. Building relationship with employers in order to access the hidden labour market
7. Benefits counselling is provided to support the person through the transition from benefits to paid work
8. Availability of time unlimited support (Avril Grant, 2020)



The IPS model has not previously been applied within the Service-User cohort currently engaged through AVision and further emphasises the credibility of AVision's work and emphasises the level baseline or starting point for Service-Users as they embark on their competitive employment journey (and further rehabilitation). Service-Users receive support in completing a comprehensive CV and also benefit from coaching and mentoring- including training in interview skills, motivation and advice on resettlement and general rehabilitation. Many Service-Users have very serious previous convictions, including serving terms of imprisonment for serious violent offences. These offending profiles can make unsupported success in gaining permanent employment highly challenging. AVision therefore seeks to provide additional self-employment

opportunities, via accredited training courses and qualifications to enable agency appointments including building, driving, railway maintenance and warehouse work. A small number of Service-Users have started small businesses, supported by modest grants, provided through the commissioning funds.

## 1.2. Progress of the Scheme

**Remarks on quantitative data:** Since September 2020, the BEST team have dealt with 236 Service-Users and have 59 ongoing clients. 60 are now in full-time employment with a further 5 who have entered self-employment. This amounts to a competitive employment rate for the cohort of 27.5%, which exceeds the UK's IPS (Individual Placement Support) cohort average up to July 2021 of 22% (<https://ipsworks.org/index.php/what-is-ips/>, 2023). The reference to figures up to July 2021 are intended to exclude the AVision IPS cohort in order to provide further contrast around outcomes. In addition, over the same period, 5 Service-Users have been re-convicted for non-violent crimes- none have been re-convicted of a violent crime. **Subsequently, this equates to a reoffending rate of 2.1%.** This compares to the recognised national reoffending rates of 25.6% for all offences and 33.4% for custodial sentences, i.e. recognised as committing a further offence within 12 months of release or previous non-custodial conviction. (Ministry of Justice, 2021).

Taking the lower average re-offending rate of 25.6%, we would have expected 60 Service-Users to re-offend. In terms of the financial costs of crime to the relevant agencies, including Health, Local Authorities, Criminal Justice System, physical and emotional impact on the victim, lost output etc, two reasonable estimates of the cost benefits in relation to the project are proposed.

The first estimate is based on those 60 Service-Users who could have been expected to re-offend. Had each committed a crime amounting to violence against the person, this would have amounted to £989,000 in costs (Home Office, 2011) (Bank of England, 2021). The second estimate takes violent crime as being a third of total crime, therefore, those 60 re-offenders would reduce to 20 who could have been expected to re-offend with a violent crime against the person. This takes the figure to £329,000 (Home Office, 2011) (Bank of England, 2021).

These figures are conservative estimates and relate to average costs of an offence of violence against the person. Violence against the person can range from the minor, i.e., common assault etc to the very serious, i.e., homicide. Clearly, the individual commission of more serious offences escalates the relevant costs. For example, each offence of serious wounding amounts to £34,000 and the current relevant costs of one homicide incident amounts to £2.1m. It cannot be known for certain whether Service-Users would have gone onto commit crimes of serious violence had it not been for the BEST interventions. However, the above estimates are reasonable in the circumstances and indicates a strong value for money element for the PCC's investment.

### **Statistical Significance**

In terms of competitive employment, comparisons have been made between the AVision cohort and the national IPS employment rate. The ratio of 27.5% employment amongst the AVision cohort compared to the 22% rate for the UK IPS rate is just outside (0.06) of the recognised null hypothesis test result where  $p$  is 0.05 and **cannot** be generally recognised as statistically significant. However, a firm inference can be argued that AVision's local outcomes are better than the national picture.

In relation to the re-offending rates, applying the null hypothesis test to indicate a correlation between re-offending rates of a non IPS cohort and re-offending rates of Service-Users subject to the IPS model through AVision also requires examination. In the circumstances of the Enterprise for Employment scheme and the associated evaluation, resources were unavailable to identify and monitor a local random control sample for offenders not subject to the IPS model. However, national re-offending rates remain a highly credible dataset and have been applied in this instance. When applying the null hypothesis test, the AVision cohort's re-offending rate of 2.1% is better (0.007) than the  $p$  value of 0.05 of the 33.4% national re-offending rates for custodial sentences. This can therefore be argued to be statistically significant and also further strengthens the offending cost benefit analysis under the Home Office costs of crime matrix.

**Remarks on qualitative data:** As part of the independent evaluation, numerous conversations with Service-Users have taken place. For the purposes of Service-User trust and confidence, all feedback about the programme has been anonymised. Many within the Service-User cohort are motivated by similar ambitions to the wider community, i.e., healthy relationships, family stability, self-actualisation, and self-respect. Overwhelmingly, Service-Users are positive about the impact of BEST (IPS) on their lives and spoke of the benefits of gaining or working effectively towards competitive employment, personal stability and training or education opportunities.

It could be argued that a number of Service-Users have matured out of the main crime age range of between 15 and 25. However, many Service-Users maintain that if it wasn't for the interventions of AVision and BEST, they would have continued to suffer from a lack of hope and the strong likelihood of entrapment within an ongoing cycle of re-offending, custody, and diminished life chances.



### 1.3 Feedback from Service Users

Over the project's life, feedback has been received from a number of service users. This amounts to an indication of the qualitative evidence, designed to inform and support the quantitative details gathered for the interim report.

The emerging themes from Service-User feedback are (a) greater support in breaking the cycle of offending, (b) greater personal confidence in securing competitive employment or enterprise opportunities, (c) increased financial stability, (d) improvements in personal and family relationships, (e) personal empowerment and self-actualisation.

**(a) Greater support in breaking the cycle of offending.**

'They supported me through my mental health conditions and helped me get into college.'

'If it wasn't for AVision, I'd have no financial security and that's a driver for crime.'

'They have a passion to help and support feels like being in a family.'

**(b) Greater personal confidence in securing employment or enterprise opportunities.**

'I knew the direction I wanted to go in- it helped me from within.'

'They helped me write a CV and gave me an interview course. I'd never had an interview before and my first two were successful- I had a choice of jobs.'

**(c) Increased financial stability.**

'When I came out of prison, it was a bit hopeless- I'd be on the dole now.'

'I've had help setting up a business with a £1500 grant.'

**(d) Improvements in personal and family relationships.**

'The job saved me and gave my partner the confidence to agree to marry me.'

'Most people I know haven't been successful in life- my family want to thank the programme.'

**(e) Personal empowerment and self-actualisation.**

'It's good to have people that believe in you.'

'The mind-set sessions worked well- words can't say what a difference it made for me.'

'I now don't let the past affect my future.'

'I'm being encouraged to go to university- they 'nag' onto us.' (Nag being used in a positive sense).

In terms of Service-User's views in improving the programme, one Service-User said that they expected to be given business opportunities immediately, rather than going through some of the formal structures of the programme. Another Service-User suggested that seminar sessions would have been helpful, with a number of Service-Users meeting with a facilitator, for mutual support and shared experiences. Service-Users overwhelmingly spoke of the commitment of the AVision Team. The qualities of staff and growing the skills base of case workers is essential for the future success of the project and any expansion into other geographical locations within the West Midlands force area.

## 2.0. Context

Violence in the West Midlands has followed the national trend and has risen consistently for a number of years. It has led to an increased fear of crime, a rise in the mental and physical injuries suffered by members of our community and many preventable deaths (WMP&Crime Commissioner, 2021).

## 2.1. Strategic Priorities

The Enterprise for Employment programme links with the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner's, 'Second Chance Charter' and Police and Crime Plan 2021-25 in tackling violent crime through public health and partnership approaches—particularly through the five strands of the West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership.

**The 5 main strands to the VRP's work include, supporting:**

1. Communities and professionals to work together
2. Interventions to prevent violence
3. The use of evidence to inform decisions
4. Leaders to connect around a shared long-term ambition
5. Production of guidance, advice, and toolkits (WMP&Crime Commissioner, 2021)

## 2.2. Geographic context

The Enterprise for Employment programme is currently only available for Service-Users living in Birmingham. Whilst this is appropriate for the purposes of the project and is aligned to A' Vison's geographical location, the evidence highlighted within this report indicates that a broader West Midlands application would increase the scope, reach and success of the project.



### **3.0. Implementation**

The commitment from Avril Grant and her team to the programme is admirable and the outcomes indicate tangible benefits for the lives of service users and their families. The achievements are all the more impressive, given the challenging conditions prevailing through the pandemic and associated lockdowns. Despite the current cost of living crisis, the post pandemic environment has seen some increased employment opportunities, with the UK now carrying more vacancies than the number of those unemployed. There are no current operational issues or concerns with the programme that would prevent it from thriving across a broader West Midlands context.

### **4.0. Concluding remarks and recommendations**

Evaluation of the Enterprise for Employment programme provides excellent evidence of tangible and sustainable success. Remarks around cost effectiveness and feedback around outcomes and outputs are positive and the programme aligns with the ambitions of the PCC's Police and Crime Plan 2021-25. Feedback from service users is highly positive and they particularly value the ongoing and bespoke support from AVision and the confidence engendered through the development of skills and entry into stable employment, enterprise training and education opportunities.

The leadership of AVision is also a significant element of the programme and Avril Grant's personal investment and engagement is demonstrably transformative. Having observed her work with Service-Users, she is a charismatic and pivotal figure.

The evidence indicates a strong sense of purpose and positive outcomes for the Service-User group. I have been impressed with the passion of Avril and her team and they can reflect on an excellent two years of outstanding service delivery of the project. The evidence speaks to the substantially positive cost/ benefit analysis and changed lives, representing excellent value for money for the PCC and fully justifies the commission and funding of the project to date.

#### **4.1. Recommendations**

There is capability for AVision and the programme to grow further and become more ambitious around the securing of even more employment, business, learning and education prospects within a post-pandemic environment.

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- Evidence supports the expansion of the programme across the remaining NPUs of the West Midlands Police area. This is based on the feedback, outcomes and outputs and would allow other Service-Users across the region to access services. It is inequitable that a successful programme of this nature is available only to people who live in Birmingham. AVision have the skills and experience along with the credibility of consistent service delivery to facilitate the broadening across the West Midlands force area, either through organisational and operational expansion- with the required increased capacity- or through acting as a consultant in developing new teams. In short, this amounts to an 'Avril equivalent' for each local Policing area.
- Further commissioning opportunities should be investigated, in order to facilitate the above approach. In addition, mainstreaming the programme as part of the West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership structure- from existing funding streams- would be equally appropriate in terms of effective offender management. This can be achieved through intensified partnership working with the Probation Service and engaging further with Health, Education and Social Care agencies. This should include clear, ethical, achievable, and agreed performance measurement outcomes.
- West Midlands Police development of Artificial Intelligence in predicting and managing high-harm offenders is class leading and is supported through the PCC's Ethics Committee. Consideration should be given to developing links with WMP Offender Managers to implement an appropriate referral mechanism for those at risk of becoming high harm/ violent offenders. AI could be used effectively to supplement and add further objectivity to the current project's often, self-selecting referral system. This will require careful oversight and governance, for example, to avoid similar issues of data-bias seen elsewhere within the Metropolitan Police Gangs Matrix. Individuals referred as Service-Users under such a mechanism, may have an absence of criminal convictions, but may nevertheless represent substantial risks of causing high harm in the future. These Service-Users could benefit considerably from support via the IPS model and therefore add further reach within the violence prevention strategy for WMP.

- Further technological innovations should also be considered for the programme, including increased social media use and the provision of an app to include advice, support and further signposting for Service-Users and potential Service-Users.
- Service-User expectations can be further effectively managed through clearly highlighting the programme's structure and the benefits accrued at each stage.
- As Service-Users become successful, consideration should be made for them to share their journey and experiences with other clients during seminars, for mutual support and learning for AVision staff. This will enhance evidence-based best practice.
- An additional benefit of the programme has been supporting Service-Users into training and further education. Although, not strictly within the original terms of 'employment and enterprise', this is an area that has justifiably been expanded in framing the programme and providing substantial personal and work-based opportunities for service users.
- The recent launch of the PCC's, 'Second Chance Charter' and the encouragement of employers to recruit ex-offenders also presents a vehicle of opportunity for reducing violent crime and re-offending behaviours.

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