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Evaluation of the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) Programme across Merseyside – Final Report

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EVALUATION OF THE MENTORS IN VIOLENCE PREVENTION (MVP) PROGRAMME ACROSS MERSEYSIDE – FINAL REPORT

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About this report

Merseyside is one of the 18 areas allocated funding in 2019 by the UK Government to establish a Violence Reduction Unit. To inform the continued development of the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP), in November 2019 (Quigg et al, 2020) and July 2020, the Merseyside Academics' Violence Prevention Partnership (MAVPP)¹ were commissioned to evaluate the VRP as a whole, and selected work programmes. This report forms one of a suite of outputs from this evaluation work programme, and specifically presents an evaluation of the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme piloted across schools in Merseyside. Additional evaluation reports for 2020/21 explore:

- The overall development and implementation of the VRP (whole system evaluation; Quigg et al, 2021);
- The VRP Data Hub (Lightowlers et al, 2021).
- The 'new' VRP Sports, Arts and Culture work programme (Hough and Quigg, 2021).
- Support programmes for the families of offenders (Ashton and Quigg, 2021).

Evaluation outputs are available on the Merseyside VRP website: www.merseysidevrp.com/what-we-do/

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- The wider MAVPP evaluation team for advising/supporting study development and/or peer review: Hannah Timpson, Matthew Millings, Sally-Ann Ashton, Carly Lightowlers and Jen Hough.



¹ MAVPP includes academic representatives from Merseyside universities, who represent a range of disciplines including public health, criminology, policing and psychology.

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Evaluation of the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) Programme across Merseyside

During the 2020/21 school year two schools from each Local Authority on Merseyside were chosen by Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) to take part in a pilot rollout of the MVP programme. MVP is a school-based violence prevention programme, with a particular emphasis on gender-based violence, which aims to increase non-violent bystander intervention through a peer education approach. Each school was allocated a school development officer from Merseyside Youth Association (MYA), the organisation procured by the VRP to oversee, support and deliver aspects of programme implementation. As part of the wider system evaluation of the Merseyside VRP, the Public Health Institute, LJMU, were commissioned to evaluate the MVP programme.

Methods



Mentor training surveys

Pre (n=140); Post (n=132)

Exploring:

- Attitudes
- Knowledge/behaviours related to violence prevention and bystander behaviour
- Mental wellbeing
- Resilience
- Basic demographic information
- Training content, delivery and usefulness (post only)

Stakeholder interviews

(N=5)

Semi-structured interviews with MYA school development officers, MYA MVP programme manager and the Merseyside VRP education lead. Interviews questions focused on:

- Perceptions of training
- Programme content/delivery
- How to identify/recruit mentors
- Barriers/facilitators
- Areas for development
- Perceived impacts

Mentor focus groups

(N=15)

Two focus groups conducted with mentors trained in MVP. Focus groups explored:

- Perceptions of training
- Programme content and delivery
- Process for identifying and recruiting mentors
- Barriers/facilitators
- Areas for development
- Perceived impacts

School staff survey

(N=5); from 4 schools

An online survey was distributed to school staff who had taken part in the MVP training at the end of the 2020/21 academic year. Exploring:

- MVP training
- Programme implementation in their school
- Sustainability
- Barriers/facilitators
- Areas for development

Dose/reach



18 school staff from nine schools received the two day MVP training from MYA school development officers.



147 mentors from nine schools received the two day MVP training. 111 mentors from seven schools had commenced delivery of the programme to mentees during 2020/21.



Approximately 830 mentees from seven schools received at least one MVP session. Approximately 330 mentees from two schools received all five MVP sessions.

Perceptions of training/programme

Staff perceptions of training*

100%

The training content was delivered in a way which was easy to understand

100%

The trainer was knowledgeable

100%

The trainer interacted with the group well

100%

I would recommend MVP training to my colleagues

100%

The training prepared me to support mentors to deliver MVP to mentees

Mentors' perceptions of training*

100%

I enjoyed taking part in it

100%

I think it's a good idea

99.2%

I would recommend it to other young people

100%

The group interacted with each other well

99.2%

It was delivered in a way which was easy to understand

Staff perceptions of programme*

100%

The programme content is relevant to my school

80.0%

The programme is needed in my school

100%

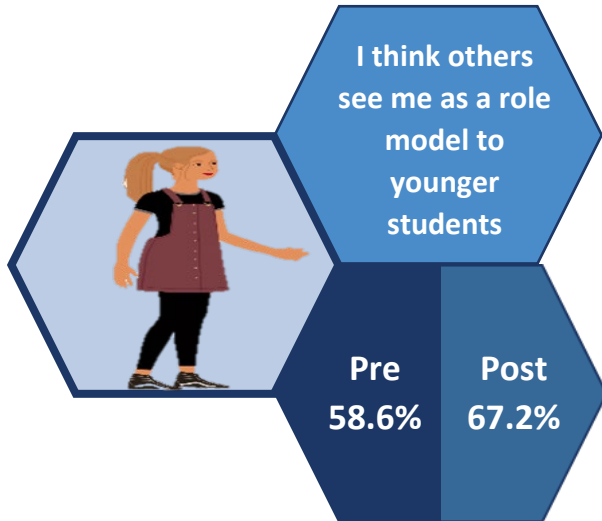
I would recommend the MVP programme to other schools

"MVP teaches you life skills on mental health and violence. It enlightens you on the effects that cause and prevent violence. For example gender lenses, victim blaming, bystanding, abuse, violence and leadership. MVP stands for Mentors in Violence Prevention and we have learned how to show these skills during our learning. Overall, we are confident in showing people what leads up to violent actions and what changes we can make to stop them. We are Mentors in Violence prevention."
Mentor, School 8



Impacts of the programme

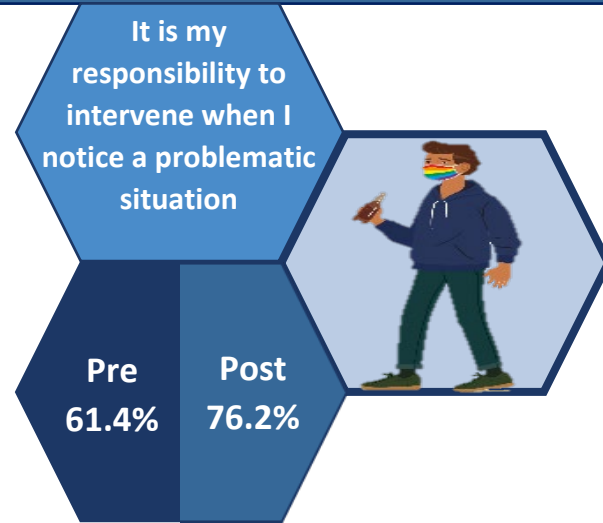
Mentors' leadership skills*^



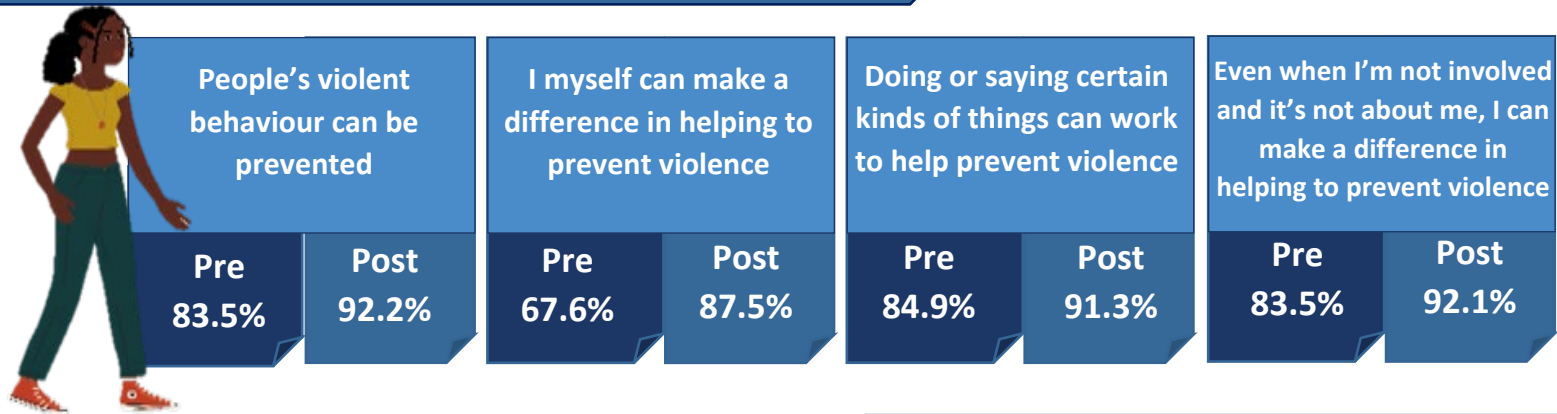
* % responding strongly agree/agree to each statement.

^ In paired analysis there was a statistically significant positive change in mean level of agreement with each statement from pre to post training.

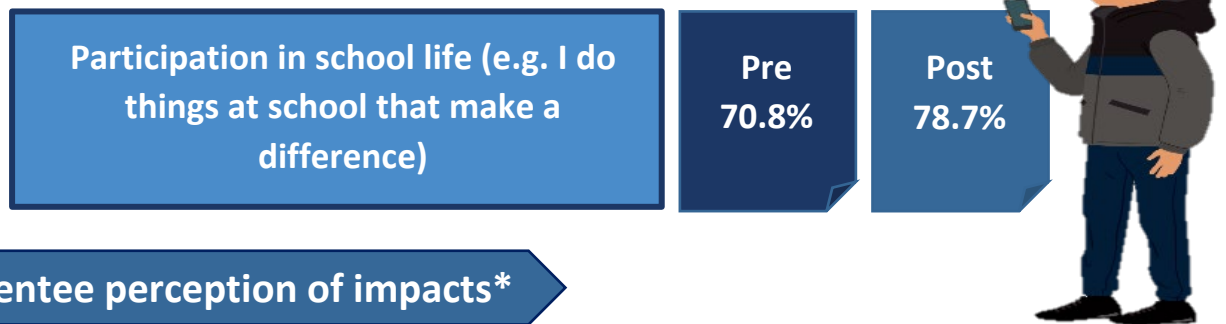
Mentors' bystander knowledge and attitudes*^



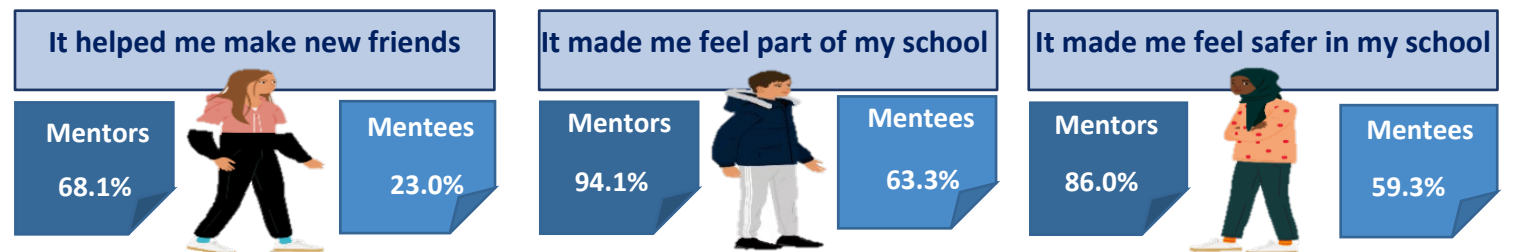
Mentors' violence prevention knowledge and attitudes*^



Mentors' resilience*^



Mentor and mentee perception of impacts*



Overall, and despite significant challenges with COVID-19 causing school closures, perceptions of the implementation and the impact of the programme have been overwhelmingly positive. Reports from school development officers and school staff suggest implementing the programme in Merseyside schools is feasible and the programme is adaptable to the local context. Crucially, findings suggest some important significant changes in mentors' attitudes and knowledge of the bystander approach to violence prevention. Overall, findings to date support the continued implementation of MVP in the pilot schools, and provides evidence that MVP could be successfully rolled out to more schools across Merseyside in the 2021/22 academic year.

Executive summary

As part of a range of activities to develop, promote and sustain a whole system public health approach to violence prevention, in 2020/21 the Merseyside VRP funded programmes, including the development and piloting of the school-based Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme. MVP is a school-based violence prevention programme, with a particular emphasis on gender-based violence, which aims to increase non-violent bystander intervention through a peer education approach to inform and empower individuals to become proactive bystanders in the face of violence. The peer education model is implemented by training students in Key Stage 4 to be mentors and deliver the MVP programme to Key Stage 3 mentees. For the 2020/21 academic year implementation began in nine out of the ten pilot schools across Merseyside. The current study aimed to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of the MVP programme being piloted in the ten Merseyside schools to monitor, document and describe the development and piloting of the programme and to assess the perceptions and impacts of the programme on mentors, mentees and the whole school. This report includes findings from interviews with MVP school development officers (youth workers from the Merseyside Youth Association [MYA], the organisation commissioned to deliver MVP), pre and post training surveys with the mentors, post programme surveys with mentees, and a school staff survey.

Findings suggest a number of key learnings about the process and impacts of MVP implementation to date in the pilot schools. Overall, and despite significant challenges with COVID-19 causing school closures, perceptions of the implementation and the impact of the programme have been overwhelmingly positive. Reports from school development officers and school staff suggest implementing the programme in Merseyside schools is feasible and the programme is adaptable to the local context. Adaptations to programme content and delivery included: inclusion of mental wellbeing and resilience components; identifying school specific issues and delivering optional modules based on these issues (e.g. racism); adaptation of the core content to the local Merseyside context (e.g. aligning sessions to PSHE outcomes and including Merseyside statistics on violence); and, delivering the programme based on individual school preferences and within COVID-19 restrictions (e.g. delivering training online). Survey findings suggest that mentors really enjoyed the concept of MVP, including the subject content and peer-education model of delivery. Crucially, findings suggest some important significant changes in mentors' attitudes and knowledge of the bystander approach to violence prevention. In addition, a number of other positive short-term outcomes for mentors were identified including increases in leadership skills, confidence, positive peer relationships and school participation, and measures of resilience factors, including self-esteem, problem solving skills, empathy and goals and aspirations. Reports from school staff and mentors, and findings from the mentee post programme survey, suggested that the programme was positively received by the mentees; in particular they liked that it was delivered by fellow students rather than teachers. Staff felt the programme had improved mentees' knowledge of violence, whilst mentors reported that mentees had come to recognise them around the schools and felt this could be a way for mentees to get support if they did not want to talk to an adult. Overall, findings to date support the continued implementation of MVP in the pilot schools, and provides evidence that MVP could be successfully rolled out to more schools across Merseyside in the 2021/22 academic year. A quote from one of the mentors provides a fantastic reflection on the pilot programme and its impact to date:

“MVP teaches you life skills on mental health and violence. It enlightens you on the effects that cause and prevent violence. For example gender lenses, victim blaming, bystanding, abuse, violence and leadership. MVP stands for Mentors in Violence Prevention and we have learned how to show these skills during our learning. Overall, we are confident in showing people what leads up to violent actions and what changes we can make to stop them.

We are Mentors in Violence Prevention.”

1. Introduction

Interpersonal violence is a global public health issue, with severe consequences for individuals' health and social prospects across the lifecourse. In addition to these individual impacts, violence affects families, communities and wider society, placing significant burdens on public services including health, criminal justice, social services and other sectors. Internationally and across the UK, there is growing recognition of the advantages of adopting a public health approach to violence prevention which aims to promote population level health and wellbeing by addressing underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood of violence, and promoting protective factors.

In 2019, the UK Home Secretary allocated £35 million to Police and Crime Commissioners in 18 areas to set up multi-agency violence reduction units. Merseyside was one of the areas allocated funding and established the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP). During 2019/20, the VRP supported the development and implementation of a range of interventions to prevent violence. In 2020/21 the VRP was allocated additional funding, and continued to implement a range of activities to develop, promote and sustain a whole system public health approach to violence prevention, including funding the implementation of a range of targeted violence prevention programmes. One of the first identified programmes was the school-based Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme. MVP is a violence prevention programme which aims to increase non-violent bystander intervention with a particular emphasis on gender-based violence, bullying and other abusive behaviours. It strongly emphasises the importance of gender stereotypes and cultural conceptions of masculinity and femininity in addressing the causes of sexual and gender-based violence [1, 2]. The programme uses a peer education model and bystander approach to support children and young people in developing healthy relationships and challenging harmful behaviours through a non-confrontational approach [1, 2]. The programme consists of interactive scenarios and group discussions and a key concept of the programme is that it is delivered by trained student peers under the supervision of trained school staff. The student mentors lead their peers (typically from a younger year group) in discussions of realistic scenarios covering a range of abusive behaviour they might witness as a bystander. A list of several actions which a bystander might consider taking in the situation are then presented and discussed as a group. In line with the programme's emphasis on gender stereotypes as root causes of sexual violence, many of the scenarios focus on stereotypes of women, how culture can encourage and reward those who tell sexist jokes and engage in stereotypical 'masculine' behaviour [1, 2]. The authors of MVP recommend a minimum of three sessions for the target group, lasting for approximately 90 minutes, however this may vary across settings (e.g. three sessions may be run on one full day or one separate days) [1, 2].

All schools across Merseyside were provided with an overview of the MVP programme by the VRP and invited to make expressions of interest to be one of the ten schools involved in the pilot. Two schools from each Local Authority on Merseyside were then chosen by the VRP to take part in a pilot rollout of the MVP programme during the 2020/21 school year. Each school who were interested in the programme were asked to commit to:

- 2 day training of an MVP school team (an senior leadership team [SLT] lead and non-teaching pastoral staff member);
- 2 day training of a selected group of potential mentors; and,
- Roll-out of a minimum of five MVP sessions to mentees.

Each school was allocated a school development officer from Merseyside Youth Association (MYA), the organisation procured by the VRP to oversee, support and deliver aspects of programme implementation. In addition schools were also provided with trauma-informed wrap-around support to complement the programme. Box 1 gives an overview of the individuals and their roles in the pilot implementation of MVP across Merseyside.

Box 1: Overview of roles and individuals involved in the MVP programme

Mentors: Secondary school Key Stage 4 students (aged 14-15 years) trained by the school development officers to deliver the MVP programme.

Mentees: Secondary school Key Stage 3 students (aged 11-14 years) who take part in the MVP programme.

MVP school leads: Two school staff members (an SLT lead and non-teaching pastoral staff member) from each school, trained by the school development officers in the MVP Mentor Support Team Professional Learning Programme to support and supervise the implementation of the MVP programme in their school.

School development officers: Three MYA (organisation commissioned to deliver MVP) staff trained in the MVP Mentor Support Team Professional Learning Programme who train the school team and the mentors in delivering the programme and provide ongoing support. Each school is assigned one of the three school development officers to support implementation.

Other key stakeholders: Two other MYA staff, the programme manager and communications officer; two members of the VRP, the Education Lead and Youth and Community Engagement Lead; and, the LJMU evaluation team.

MVP was established in the United States and to date has primarily been evaluated in college populations [2, 3]. More recently the programme has been implemented in Scotland, with initial qualitative evaluations suggesting it is adaptable to a UK high school setting, and indicating positive perceptions of MVP in terms of recruitment, training and implementation processes [4]. Initial findings from studies of implementation in Scotland high schools and more empirical studies from US college populations suggest emerging evidence for the efficacy of MVP in changing attitudes and norms, and preventing gender-based violence and other abusive behaviours [3, 4, 5]. However to date MVP has not been evaluated in an English school setting and more rigorous study of the impacts of the programme is also required. Further, MYA, the organisation commissioned to support implementation in Merseyside schools are adapting the programme to include an additional focus on students' mental wellbeing and resilience, aspects which have not yet been evaluated as a specific aim of the programme. As part of the wider system evaluation of the Merseyside VRP, the Public Health Institute, LJMU, were commissioned to evaluate the MVP programme.

1.1 Study aims and objectives

The current study aims to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of the MVP programme piloted ten schools across Merseyside. The evaluation had two core objectives, which include a number of research questions.

1. To monitor, document and describe the development and piloting of the MVP programme (process evaluation).
 - To describe the implementation of the MVP programme in and across each of the pilot schools, including set up and training, and programme content and delivery;
 - To understand the extent to which the intervention was piloted as planned (fidelity);
 - To identify how much of the intervention was piloted (dose);
 - To explore the uptake of the programme amongst the target population (reach);
 - To elicit the facilitators and/or barriers to programme development and piloting; and,
 - To identify areas for development and sustainability.

2. To assess the perceptions and impacts of the MVP programme (outcome evaluation).
 - To explore school staff, mentor and mentee perceptions of the training and the programme;
 - To identify changes in mentor knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to violence prevention and bystander behaviour; mental health and resilience; and,
 - To explore other potential outcomes of the programme on mentors and mentees.

2. Methodology

To meet study objectives, a range of methods were implemented with findings triangulated to inform the process and outcome evaluation.

2.1 Methods

2.1.1 Review of project documentation

Documentation, materials and correspondence produced throughout the implementation of the MVP programme in each of the schools were collated and reviewed. This included information on programme content, any individual level school changes to content or format of the programme, and data collected by MYA (e.g. pre-implementation surveys which sought to identify the perceived issues for each individual school). In addition, researchers regularly observed the development and piloting of the MVP programme through attending monthly steering group meetings and training. Information collected through such review and observation is used throughout the findings to complement data collected by other methods.

2.1.2 Stakeholder semi-structured interviews

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders who had a key role in the implementation of the intervention. Participants included MYA school development officers (n=3), MYA MVP programme manager (n=1), and the Merseyside VRP education lead (n=1). Interview length ranged in time from 43 minutes to 1 hour 32 minutes, and were carried out online (n=5). Interview questions focused on: perceptions of training; programme content and delivery, including any adaptations; process for identifying and recruiting mentors; factors supporting and impeding implementation of MVP; areas for development; and, perceived impacts on mentors, mentees, school staff and the wider school context.

2.1.3 Mentor focus groups

Two focus groups were conducted with mentors (n=15) trained in MVP and involved in programme implementation. Focus groups took approximately 30 minutes and were carried out in person. Focus groups explored: perceptions of the training; perceptions of delivering the programme; factors supporting and impeding implementation of MVP; areas for development; and, perceived impacts on mentors, mentees, school staff and the wider school context.

2.1.4 Mentor surveys

Pre and post training surveys were implemented with all mentors taking part in the training. 140 mentors completed the pre training mentor survey. The post training survey was completed by 132 mentors², which represented a 94.3% retention rate. Surveys aimed to identify individual level changes in: attitudes, knowledge and behaviours related to violence prevention and bystander behaviour; mental wellbeing; and, resilience. Survey questions included: basic demographic information; perceptions of the training content, delivery and usefulness (post only); and, a number of validated measures (pre and post) including:

- **The Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS)** [6]: 14-item measure that assesses respondents' mental wellbeing covering both feeling and functional aspects of wellbeing. Respondents choose the response which best describes their experience for each statement over the last two weeks, producing a total score from 7-35, where a higher score indicates a higher

² All mentors who completed the 2 day training completed the post training survey. 8 mentors who started the training did not wish to continue on day 2.

level of wellbeing. WEMWBS has been validated with English children aged 13 years and above, and has been used in previous research with children aged 11 years and above [7, 8].

- **The Student Resilience Survey** [9]: measures different protective factors in children's lives and includes a number of different subscales measuring each factor. The current study used the subscales for self-esteem, empathy, problem solving, goals and aspirations, participation in home life, and, participation in school life. Participants choose the response (on a 5-point scale from never to always) which best describes their experience for each statement currently. Total scores for each subscale were calculated by averaging participant's scores on each question related to that construct (e.g. participation in school life). Total scores were then categorised as high (3.6-5), moderate (2.5-3.5) and low (1-2.4).
- **Slaby Bystander Efficacy Scale** [10]: 8-item scale which measures individuals' beliefs about the efficacy of violence prevention. Participants indicate on a five-point scale how much they agree with each item (1=strongly disagree: 5=strongly agree).
- **Bystander Intervention Survey** [11]: 6-item scale measuring perceptions of leadership skills and attitudes to intervening in problematic situations. Participants indicate on a five-point scale how much they agree with each item (1=strongly disagree: 5=strongly agree).

2.1.5 Mentee surveys

Pre and post programme surveys were also piloted with mentees taking part in the programme to explore the feasibility, reliability and validity of the survey design and included measures. Survey questions included the same validated measures as mentor surveys (above), as well as basic demographics and perceptions of the programme content, delivery and usefulness (post only). Given the COVID-19-related delays in implementation of programmes in many schools and issues with attrition from pre to post programme survey (due to isolations etc.), mentee changes in validated measures, from pre to post programme survey, are not presented in this report but in a separate Annex (available from the authors or the VRP on reasonable request). Findings from the post programme survey (n=267) on mentees' perceptions of the programme content, delivery and usefulness are included in the current report.

2.1.6 School staff survey

An online survey was distributed to school staff who had taken part in the MVP training at the end of the 2020/21 academic year. The survey was completed by five staff from four schools. The survey explored staff perceptions on: the MVP training, programme implementation in their school, sustainability, facilitating factors and challenges or barriers to implementation, and, areas for development.

2.2 Data analyses

Quantitative analyses were undertaken in SPSS (v27) using descriptive statistics. Chi-square for Independence (with Yates Continuity Correction) was used to identify associations between age and gender and measures of leadership skills, bystander knowledge, violence prevention knowledge, resilience and mental wellbeing amongst mentors. Where data was available to match mentors' pre and post training surveys, paired samples t-tests were used to identify statistically significant changes from pre to post training on a number of measures (e.g. mean scores on violence prevention knowledge pre and post training). Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from the interviews [12]. The analysis is presented with illustrative quotes where appropriate to highlight key findings.

2.3 Ethical approval

Ethical approval was obtained from Liverpool John Moores University (REC no. 20/PHI/019), and the study adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki.

3. Findings

3.1 Pre-programme context

3.1.1 Background of the organisation delivering MVP and school development officers

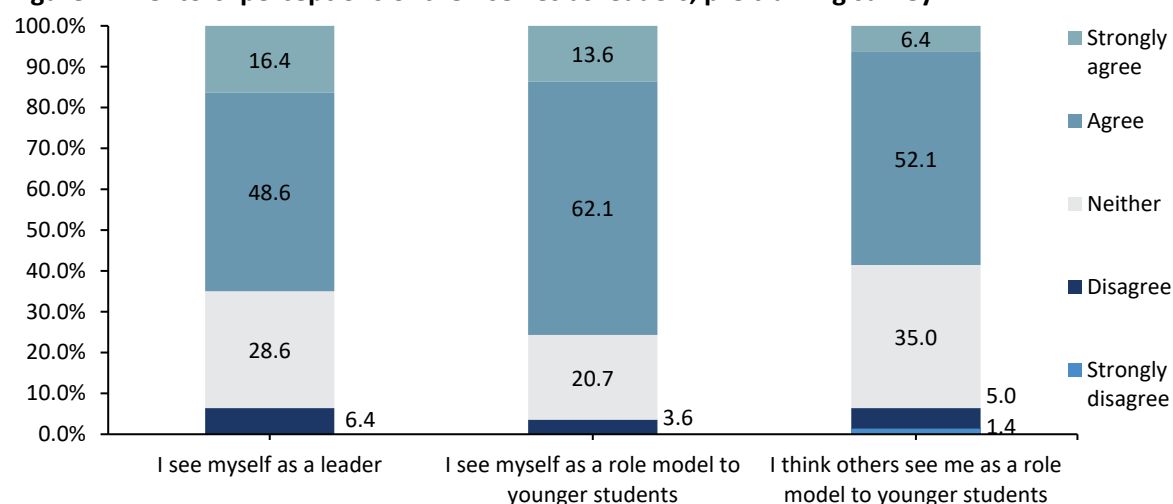
Merseyside Youth Association (MYA) was procured by the Merseyside VRP to deliver MVP in the ten pilot schools. Established in 1890 MYA delivers a range of early intervention and prevention projects and workforce development related to children and young people (from preconception up to age 25 years) across Merseyside [13]. Three MYA staff (one fulltime, two part-time) were identified to be trained in MVP and fulfil the role of school development officers. Two MYA staff were members of the MYA RAISE mental health team and all had previous experience working with schools and young people to implement a range of interventions including mental health support, resilience building, and peer mentoring. MVP programme delivery was overseen by MYA's mental health programme manager, who also received the training, whilst promotion of the programme was supported by MYA's communication officer.

3.1.2 Mentors' skills and knowledge pre MVP participation

Mentors' leadership skills

Prior to taking part in the MVP training, mentors were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements relating to leadership using a five point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree³ (Figure 1). The majority of mentors perceived themselves as a leader and agreed⁴ with the statements: I see myself as a leader (65.0%; n=91); and, I see myself as a role model to younger students (75.7%; n=106). However, only half (58.6%; n=82) of mentors agreed that others saw them as a role model to younger students prior to taking part in the training. A significantly higher proportion of female mentors (65.6%; n=59) agreed that others saw them as a role model to younger students, compared to male mentors (45.8%; n=22; p<0.05). There was no significant associations between age or sex and the proportion of mentors agreeing with each of the other statements.

Figure 1: Mentors' perceptions of themselves as leaders, pre training survey



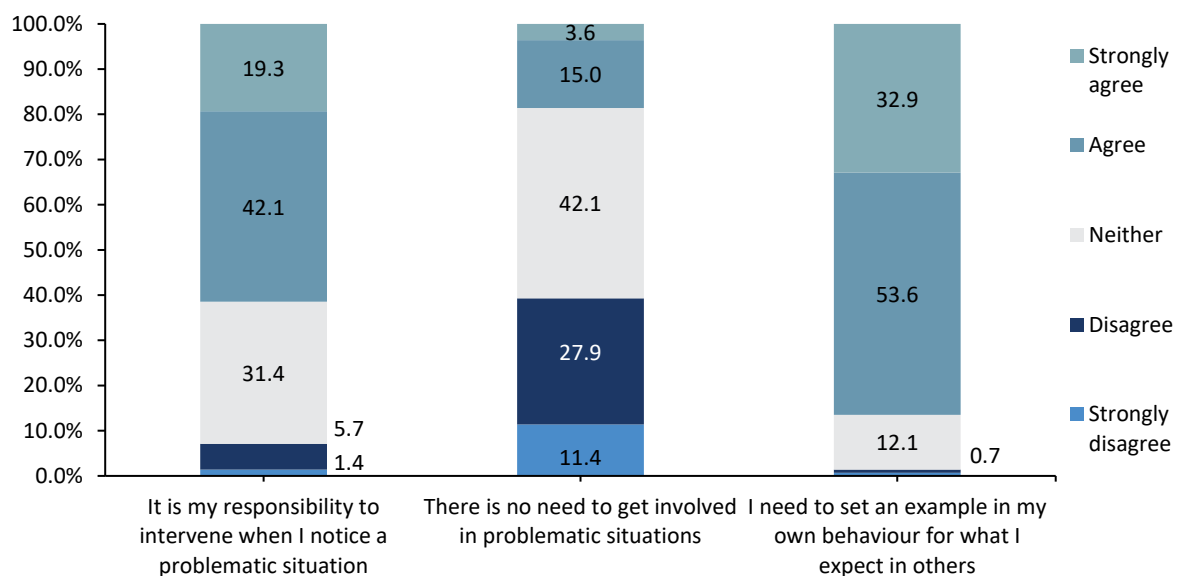
³ Strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, strongly disagree.

⁴ Including strongly agree and agree.

Mentors' attitudes and knowledge related to bystander behaviour

Prior to taking part in the MVP training, mentors were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements relating to bystander behaviour using a five point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree³ (Figure 2). The majority (86.4%; n=121) of mentors agreed⁴ that they should set an example in their own behaviour for what they expect in others (Figure 2). Approximately six in ten (61.4%; n=86) agreed with the statement it is my responsibility to intervene when I notice a problematic situation, and just 18.6% (n=26) agreed that there is no need to get involved in problematic situations (Figure 2). A significantly higher proportion of female mentors (24.4%; n=22) agreed that there is no need to get involved in problematic situations, compared to male mentors (8.3%; n=4; p<0.05). There was no significant associations between age or sex and the proportion of mentors agreeing with each of the other statements related to bystander behaviour.

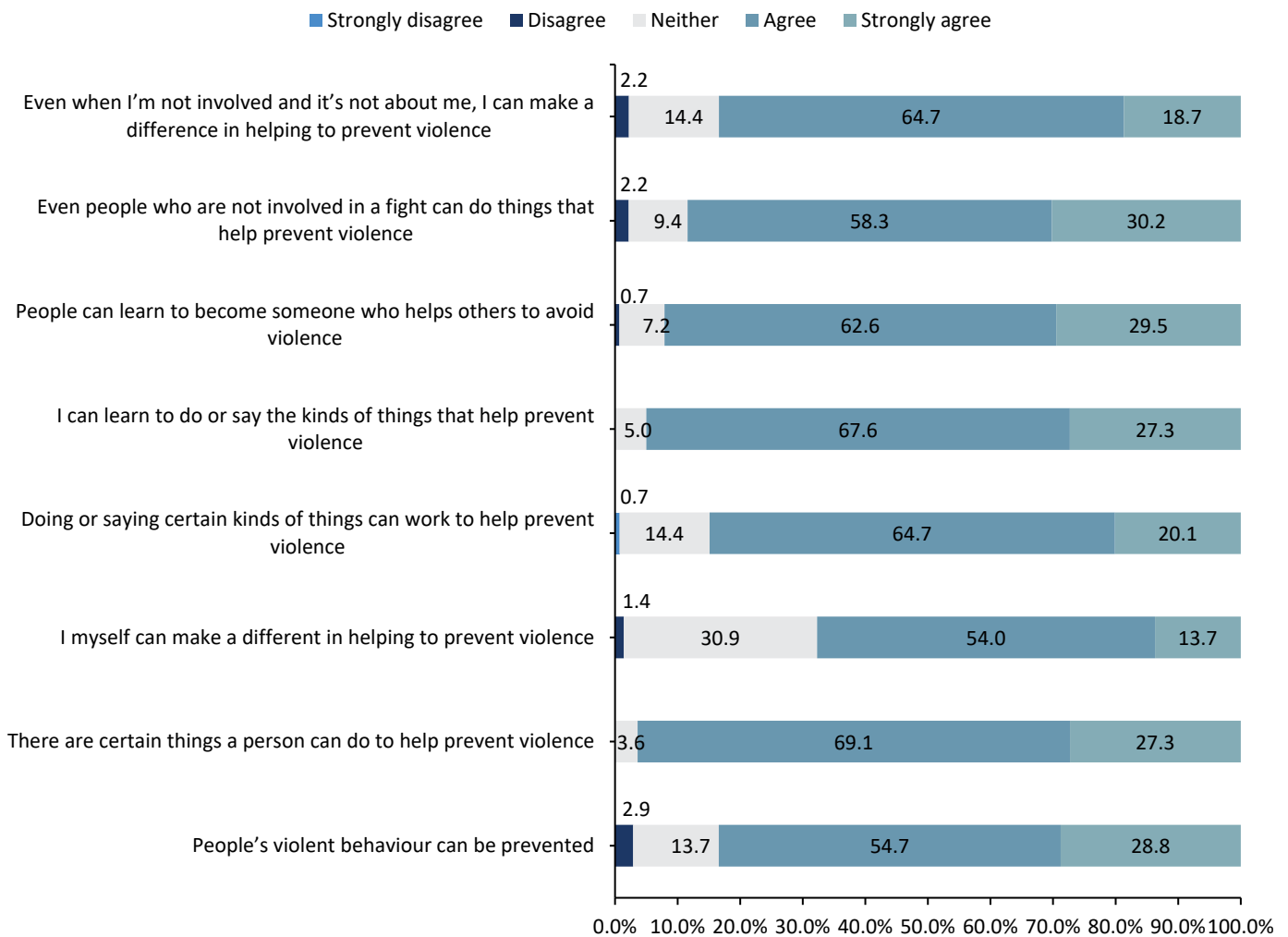
Figure 2: Mentors' attitudes to bystander behaviour, pre training survey



Mentors' attitudes and knowledge related to violence prevention

Pre training, the majority of mentors agreed⁴ with the statements regarding the preventability of violence: people's violent behaviour can be prevented (83.5%; n=116); there are certain things a person can do to help prevent violence (96.4%; n=134); doing or saying certain kinds of things can work to help prevent violence (82.3%; n=51; Figure 3). Whilst fewer mentors agreed that they could make a difference in helping to prevent violence (67.6%; n=94), almost all mentors agreed that they could learn to do or say the kinds of things that help prevent violence (95.0%; n=132; Figure 3). The majority of mentors (92.1%; n=128) also agreed that people can learn to become someone who helps others to avoid violence (Figure 3). The majority of mentors also agreed with statements regarding a bystander approach to violence prevention: even people who are not involved in a fight can do things that help prevent violence (88.5%; n=123); and, even when I'm not involved and it's not about me, I can make a difference in helping to prevent violence (83.5%; n=116; Figure 3). There was no significant association between the proportion of mentors agreeing with the statements related to violence prevention and age or sex.

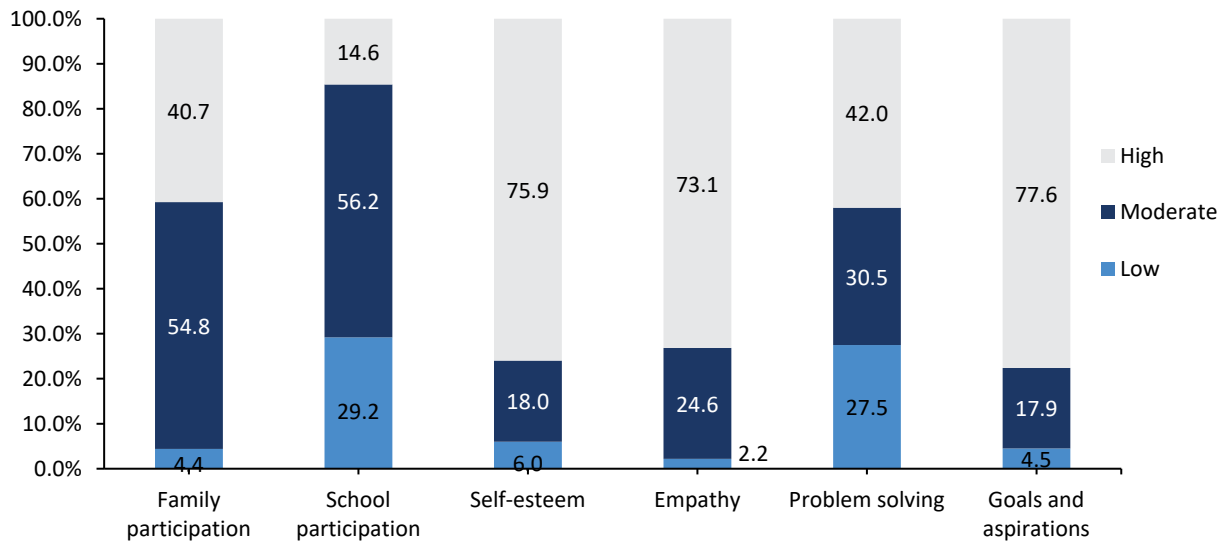
Figure 3: Mentors' attitudes towards violence prevention, pre training survey



Other factors

Prior to taking part in the training, mentors completed a series of questions measuring six constructs of resilience including aspects of positive involvement in home and school life (e.g. I help my family make decisions, I do things at school that make a difference) and individual characteristics including self-esteem, empathy, problem solving and goals and aspirations. Six in ten (54.8%; n=74) mentors had moderate scores on family participation, 40.7% (n=55) high scores, and 4.4% (n=6) low scores (Figure 4). Over half (56.2%; n=73) of mentors had moderate scores on school participation, 29.2% (n=38) low scores, and 14.6% (n=19) high scores. Seven in ten (75.9%; n=101) mentors had high self-esteem scores, 18.0% (n=24) moderate scores, and 6.0% (n=8) low scores. Three quarters (73.1%; n=98) of mentors had high empathy scores, 24.6% (n=33) moderate scores, and 2.2% (n=3) low scores. Four in ten (42.0%; n=55) mentors had high problem solving scores, 30.5% (n=40) moderate scores, and 27.5% (n=36) low scores. Over three quarters (77.6%; n=104) of mentors had high scores on the goals and aspirations scale, 17.9% (n=24) moderate scores, and 4.5% (n=6) low scores. There was no significant association between any of the six constructs of resilience, and age or gender.

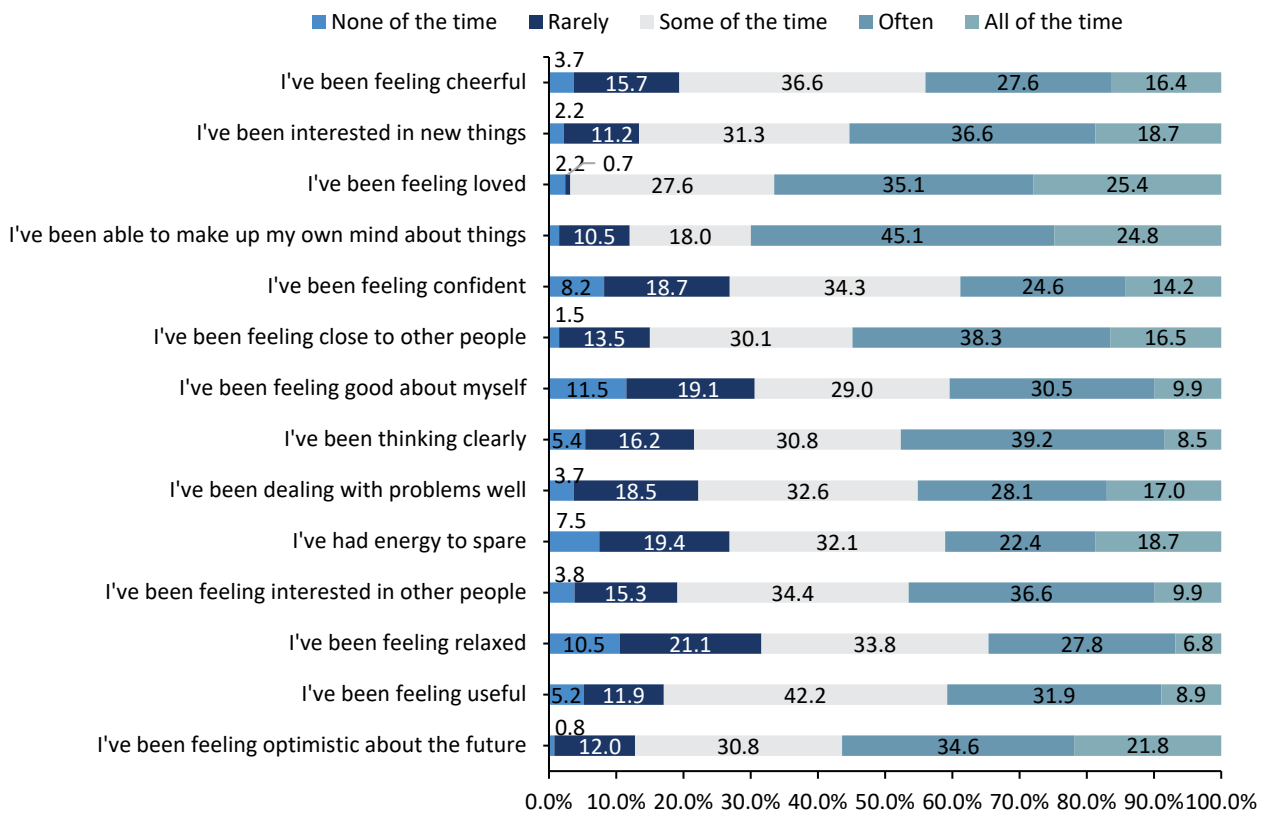
Figure 4: Mentors' scores on resilience measures, pre training survey



Prior to taking part in the training, mentors completed the WEMWBS measure of mental wellbeing. Over the two weeks prior to the training, the proportion of mentors who responded positively⁵ to each of the questions on wellbeing was: 44.0% (n=59) feeling cheerful; 55.2% (n=74) interested in new things; 60.4% (n=81) feeling loved; 69.9% (n=93) able to make up their own mind; 38.8% (n=52) feeling confident; 54.9% (n=73) feeling close to other people; 40.5% (n=53) feeling good about themselves; 47.7% (n=62) thinking clearly; 45.2% (n=61) dealing with problems well; 41.0% (n=55) energy to spare; 46.6% (n=61) interested in other people; 34.6% (n=46) feeling relaxed; 40.7% (n=55) feeling useful; and, 56.4% (n=75) optimistic about the future (Figure 5). The mean score on the total wellbeing measure was 47.31 (range: 24-70; n=116). This is lower than the mean wellbeing score for children aged 13-15 years in the English population based on findings from the Health Survey for England 2015 (mean score=51.4) [14]. Total scores were then categorised into low (≤ 40), moderate (41-59), and high (≥ 60) based on standard WEMWBS cut-offs [15]. Over six in ten (63.8%; n=74) mentors had moderate wellbeing, 26.7% (n=31) had low wellbeing and 9.5% (n=11) had high wellbeing. There was no significant association between wellbeing category and age or gender.

⁵ Including 'all of the time' and 'often'.

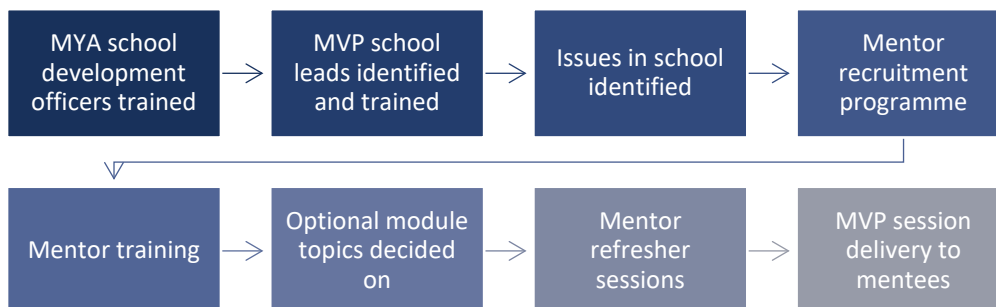
Figure 5: Mentors' mental wellbeing (in the past two weeks), pre training survey



3.2 Overview of the Merseyside MVP Prevention programme

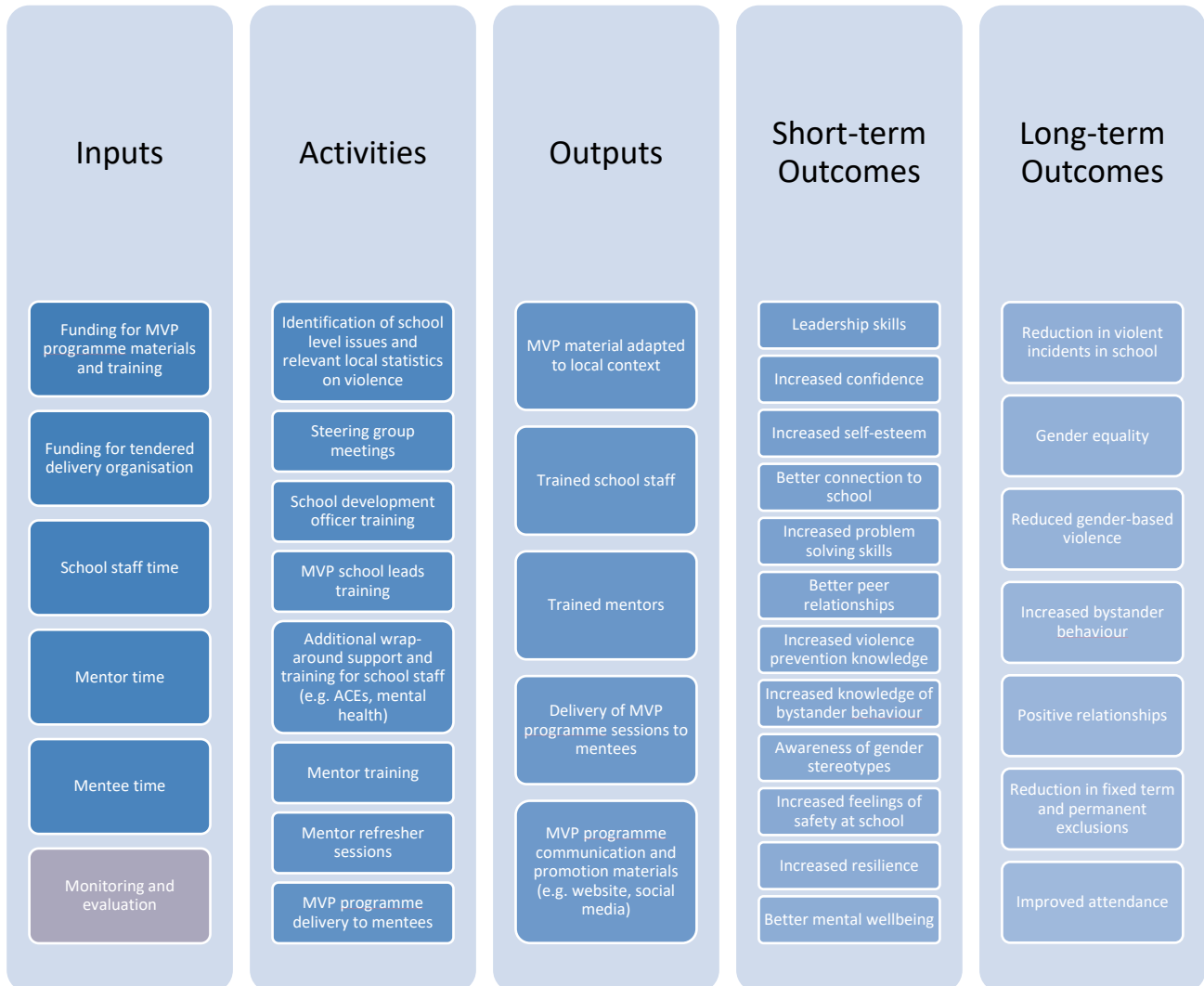
Set up and implementation of the MVP programme in the ten pilot schools began in August 2020 and took place in a number of sequential steps including: training of the MYA school development officers by an MVP Scotland representative; training of MVP school staff teams by school development officers; specific issues in each school identified via consultation with school teachers and children; mentor recruitment programme by school staff; training of mentors by school development officers; optional module topics decided on by school staff; refresher sessions and ongoing support from school development officers to mentors; and, delivery of MVP sessions to mentees by mentors, overseen by school staff (Figure 6).

Figure 6: MVP programme implementation process model



A logic model of the Merseyside MVP programme was developed based on the evaluation findings and is provided in Figure 7. This provides an overview of the inputs and resources needed to implement the programme, the activities which are implemented as part of MVP, the outputs, and the anticipated short and long-term outcomes for mentors, mentees, staff and the wider school.

Figure 7: MVP programme logic model



3.2.1 School development officer training

The three MYA school development officers and the programme manager received the two day MVP Mentor Support Team Professional Learning Programme face-to-face from a former representative of MVP Scotland⁶. All MVP Scotland programme resources were provided to the development officers on a memory stick as part of the training package. The first day of the training covered the background, rationale and content of the MVP programme, whilst the second day included discussion of practical planning and implementation of the programme in and across schools, including barriers encountered in the Scottish role out and ways these could be overcome. The training also included elements of train-the-trainer skills to prepare the school development officers for delivering the school staff and mentor training.

⁶ Two additional MYA staff who were not involved in programme implementation in the ten pilot schools also attended the training in case roll-out was continued and/or expanded to more schools in the future.

School development officer perceptions of the training were really positive overall and all mentioned how good the trainer was in delivering the training “[Trainer] did an amazing job, so yeah she was really good.” “But she sort of like she wasn't leaving that room until we were 100% sure on what we were doing. So it felt really supportive.” Whilst the team were very experienced in youth work and interventions particularly in the area of mental health, they reported finding the topic and approach of MVP innovative, interesting and exciting “because it was a new spin that we hadn't really looked down the angle of violence prevention within our team. It was a real interest for all of us, because we know these things were happening within schools, we work with young people that discuss some of these issues. But in terms of an intervention, we weren't doing it at that time... it was brilliant, it really was. It was really chilled, but really powerful as well. And as I say, because it was all new stuff I felt like we were all just like sponges taking it all in and yeah eager to deliver. We're excited.”

3.2.2 MVP school staff identification and training

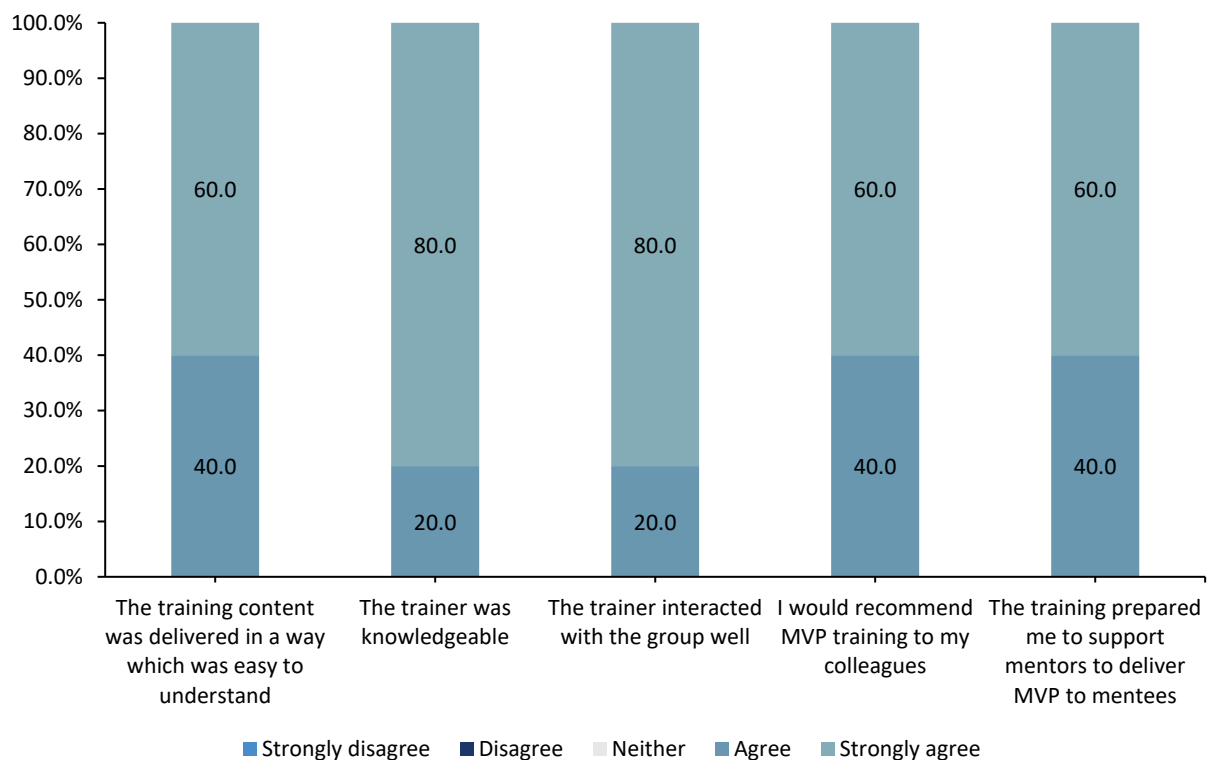
The head teacher from each of the participating schools was asked to identify two staff members to form the MVP school team. The VRP recommended to the head teacher that this should include a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and a non-teaching pastoral staff member. The school development officers had no involvement in the selection of the school team. School development officers reported that it would have been advantageous to be able to do an awareness session with staff and/or the whole school prior to staff being selected to be part of the school team. This would have provided staff with a better understanding of the programme and the level of commitment and time required to support implementation. It was felt this would have resulted in those staff who were most interested in the programme and who had the capacity to support it to take part - “I think that is one big area for improvement going forward. Because I think, from my experience of my schools, and whether the head teacher has just forgotten about it come around, and then they quickly selected two members of staff, and they were like, just going on this two day training and didn't really know what it entailed. Yeah. And so I think there needs to be a lot of clarity over what's expected from those staff. So I do wonder whether going forward, we need to have an actual timeline of what time is expected from a staff member. Yeah, almost like a bit of a job description in a way. Without scaring them because I think, you know, teachers and staff in general in school have got so much on their plate.” An ideal staff team was perceived to be one which included staff who were interested and enthusiastic about the programme, had the authority and ability to allow mentors time off to take part, but most importantly had good relationships with the students and knew them well - “I think there definitely needs to be an SLT staff member who has got the influence over you know, allowing young people off timetable and making those decisions but for me, it is absolutely about that relationship. So you know, by all means have your year head or your assistant head whatever it is. But it could be the lead and mentor that the young people or go to, you know, the pastoral says it could be anybody. So I think, I think one, it's about the staff member having an interest in this sort of stuff as well, because one of the members of staff was an ex policeman and on the training, and he was well into it, because it was a passion of his. So I think that there's a thing there about, you know, staff have an interest in it, because you get the buy in. But also, it's got to be that member of staff has just got the relationship with young people.”

The MVP Mentor Support Team Professional Learning Programme was delivered to school staff by the school development officers. Each training session included at least two schools to better facilitate discussions (session 1, 3 schools; session 2, 5 schools; session 3, 1 school). The training took place over two days either face-to-face (n=1) or virtually (n=2) depending on COVID-19 restrictions at the time of delivery. Whilst face-to-face sessions were considered preferable by school development officers, they reported that the virtual training sessions still worked well and they were able to use breakout

rooms to discuss school specific implementation with each of their schools. The first day of training covered the background, rationale and content of the MVP programme, whilst the second day was aimed at supporting the staff to plan for implementation and develop initial action plans which would support the delivery of the programme within the school and the wider learning community - “on day two in regards to the implementation and planning, we were then able to sit with our specific school and actually have a good couple of hours on how can we move forward with what are our next steps? So it actually worked out absolutely lovely.”

Whilst only five (out of a possible 18) school staff completed the survey, findings on perceptions of the training content and delivery were overwhelmingly positive with 100% of staff agreeing⁴ with each statement (Figure 8).

Figure 8: School staff perceptions of the training, staff survey



3.2.3 Mentor identification and training

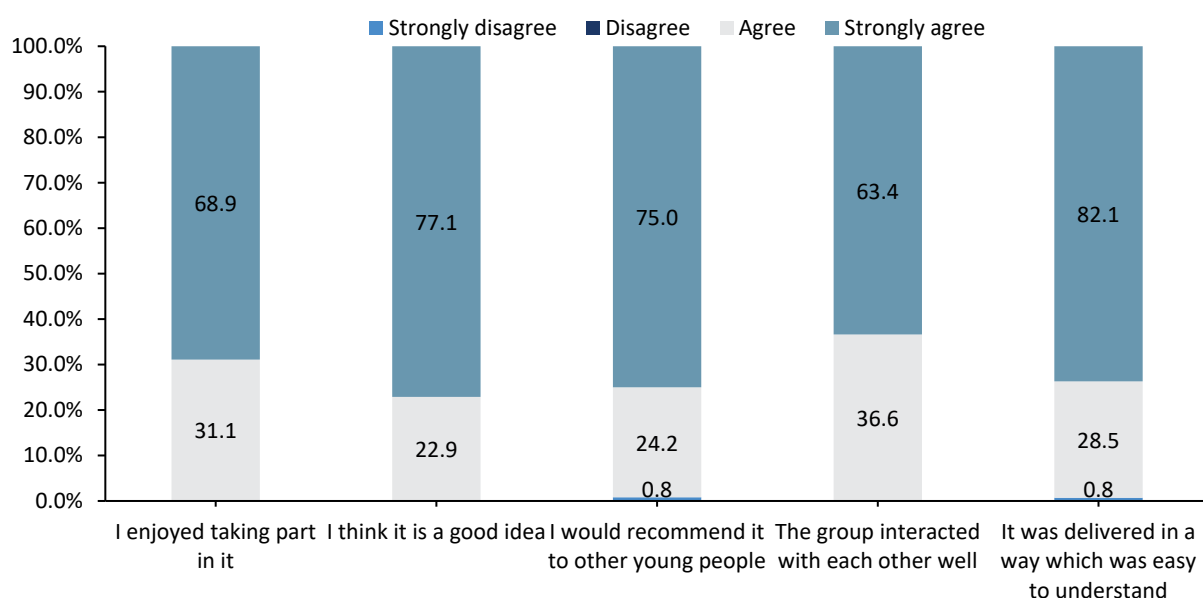
During school staff training the qualities and attributes the chosen mentors would ideally have was emphasised and discussed. Specifically, school development officers recommended that mentors were young people who were not those that typically were involved in extra-curriculum programmes, had perfect attendance or attainment, or who were school prefects. It was recommended that mentors were students who reflected the diverse pupil population of the school (e.g. including both males and females) and had the potential to be good leaders and were individuals younger students would listen to - “what we didn't want to do is identify all those, all the good students, all the students that had leadership quality right at the start, this is a programme that really is about identifying young people that are leaders without necessarily identifying themselves as leaders, and that they've got a grass root level where they're able to really understand how life works. You know, just on basic levels of how people interact with each other, you know, the rules of young people really.” Students were identified to be mentors by staff using their knowledge of which pupils would best fit the recommended criteria or by providing all students with an overview of the MVP programme at an

assembly (delivered by the school development officer) and asking them to apply to be a mentor (see section 3.4.2) - “And by the end of the training, they're just like, going, oh, I've got I've got a number of people in my head, I want to go and ask them, and because of the relationship that they have with their young people, they then phrase it, or they put it into a place where they're encouraging their young people to get involved.”

Each school’s mentor training was delivered individually by the allocated school development officer. Training took place over two days and was delivered either face-to-face or virtually depending on COVID-19 restrictions at the time of delivery (see section 3.2.2).

Findings from the mentor post training survey demonstrated overwhelming support and positive perceptions of the MVP mentor training. After taking part in the training, mentors were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about the training using a four point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Figure 9). 100% of mentors agreed⁴ that: they enjoyed taking part in the training (n=132), they thought it was a good idea (n=131); and, the group interacted with each other well during training (n=131). The majority of mentors also agreed that the training was delivered in a way that was easy to understand (99.2%; n=129) and, they would recommend it to other young people (99.2%; n=131).

Figure 9: Mentors’ perceptions of the training, post training survey



Findings from the focus groups, survey and from school development officer consultations with the mentors after the training highlighted a number of key themes relating to aspects of the training that mentors reported particularly enjoying or which they thought worked well including:

1. **Mode of delivery:** Mentors reported enjoying the interactive nature of the MVP training including the activities, for example making posters, having group discussions and debates, and the resources and refreshments provided during the sessions.
2. **MYA school development officers:** Mentors made specific mention of the school development officers who provided the mentor training and ongoing support. They reported that the officers were approachable, supportive and they felt able to speak their mind and confide in them. They also reported that the training was entertaining and fun and they enjoyed “the fact it was chill”.

3. **New knowledge, skills and perspectives:** Mentors reported enjoying learning about gender-based violence, the bystander approach to violence prevention and examples and discussions on how to they could react and behave if they saw incidents of violence or other concerns. Mentors also spoke about the new skills they had learned during the training including presentation and public speaking skills, teamwork skills, and leadership skills - “I learnt how to do a successful presentation”.

“MVP teaches you life skills on mental health and violence. It enlightens you on the effects that cause and prevent violence. For example gender lenses, victim blaming, bystanding, abuse, violence and leadership. MVP stands for Mentors in Violence Prevention and we have learned how to show these skills during our learning. Overall, we are confident in showing people what leads up to violent actions and what changes we can make to stop them. We are mentors in violence prevention.” Mentor, School 8 (MYA secondary data)

Figure 10: Common phrases and words used by mentors to describe parts of the training that worked well, post training survey



Mentors were also asked if there was anything about the training they thought could be made better. 24 of the 51 (79 left the box blank) mentors who wrote an answer in the free text box said that nothing needs to be changed and they would keep it exactly as it was. One suggestion for improvement was to include more activities and make it more interactive in parts or include other speakers. Some mentors said more time was needed, particularly to practice their sessions, however others thought it took too much time and perhaps breaks were needed. Lots of mentors suggested having more of the interactive activities such as the games, videos and practical activities in the sessions. One mentor also suggested it would have been useful to have some guidance on how to deal with difficult classes of mentees.

3.3 MVP programme content and delivery

The Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme consists of five core components including [16]:

1. **Exploring violence through a gendered lens:** MVP facilitates debate on traditional and current social understanding of masculinity, femininity, sex and gender. Sessions explore how these norms can play a role in supporting or condoning bullying and gender-based violence,

including the role of objectification of women in the media. Machoism in the media is also explored and how this can contribute to pressure on boys/men. Discussions focus on how stereotypes of masculinity and femininity might affect young people's willingness to intervene and interrupt abusive behaviour.

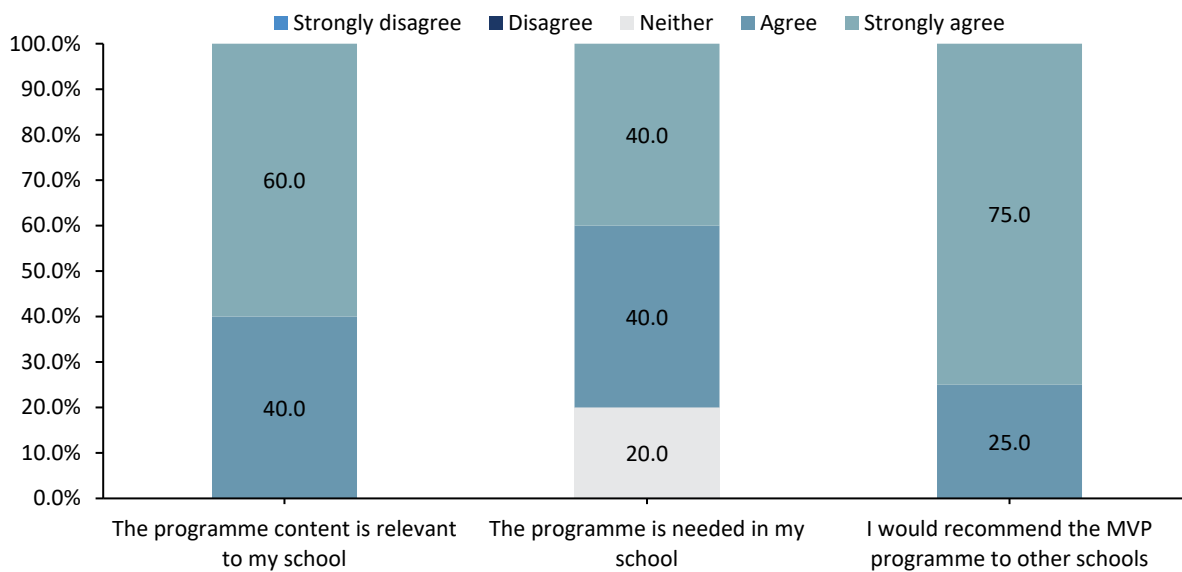
2. **Developing leadership:** MVP is a leadership programme that encourages participants to be active bystanders in situations where people may walk away or remain silent. The programme facilitates the development of positive role models who are empowered to support and challenge peers.
3. **Using a bystander approach:** Using a bystander approach individuals are not considered potential victims or perpetrators; instead, they are empowered to be active bystanders with the ability to support and challenge their peers in a safe way. The sessions focus on asking the 'why' question and allowing participants to have meaningful conversations which aim to construct and support healthy social norms. The approach includes noticing something is wrong, recognising it is wrong, deciding you have the personal responsibility to intervene, and having the skills and confidence to act.
4. **Exploring the scope of violent behaviour:** MVP emphasises that violence includes all types of abuse including verbal, emotional, physical and sexual.
5. **Challenging victim blaming:** MVP sessions aim to discuss the issue of victim blaming and emphasise that the only person to blame for violence or abuse is the perpetrator.

MVP is designed to provide participants with the skills to intervene in problematic situations through discouragement and interruption. It does this through group sessions during which social scenarios involving a range of behaviours (e.g. bullying, sexting, harassment) are presented and role-played. This is followed by an interactive discussion and responses to the scenario are then presented and considered, to teach the participants about appropriate actions that they could take and empower them to be proactive bystanders. The programme consists of two core sessions and a minimum of three optional sessions⁷. Core sessions one and two focus on MVP core values and approach, specifically the bystander approach and gender-based violence. Optional sessions include a choice of 20 topics: including insults, online abuse, being left out, rumours, dating abuse, controlling behaviour, sexting, sexual harassment in school, shaming/labelling, carrying weapons, homophobic bullying, transphobic bullying, viewing pornography, child sexual exploitation, impact of pornography on relationships, alcohol and consent, county lines, suicide, racism, and disability. Thus the topic of the social scenario may vary in each session but the mode of delivery and core messages of MVP are the same.

For the 2020/21 academic year, programme delivery had commenced in seven schools and been completed in two schools. Some initial findings from these schools suggested perceptions of the programme by school staff, mentors and mentees were positive. Findings from the staff survey showed the majority of staff agreed⁴: the programme content was relevant to their school (100%; n=5); the programme was needed in their school (80%; n=4); and, they would recommend the programme to other schools (100%; n=4; Figure 11).

⁷ For the pilot, schools were asked to commit to delivering the two core sessions and three optional sessions. However MVP delivery could in theory consist of as many optional sessions as desired.

Figure 11: School staff perceptions of the MVP programme, staff survey



Findings from the focus groups and MYA secondary data provided insight into mentors’ experiences of delivering the programme. Mentors reported feeling nervous prior to delivering the first session, however following support from the school development officers and practice, mentors reported increased confidence in delivering the sessions.

“At first it was a bit nerve racking but once it was explained to me it helped me to deliver it. With every session I knew more on how to do it and deliver the session so I became more confident.”
Mentor, School 3 (MYA secondary data)

“I was a bit nervous but when you got used to the kids because it was the same group for each session so you got used to them.” Mentor, School 3 (MYA secondary data)

“At first I was nervous but once I got into it I felt more comfortable and knew what we were going to say.” Mentor, School 3 (MYA secondary data)

“I was sweating, but I still did it, it was horrible at first, after it I felt sort of proud.” Mentor, School 2 (MYA secondary data)

It was reported by a school staff member that mentors supported each other during the delivery of the session and worked really well as a team - “mentors supported each other prior to delivering by talking to each other and encouraging each other. Some mentors took over bits that other people missed out, they worked as a team brilliantly. Beforehand, they tried to play to their own strengths, but on the day you have to adapt yourself and for the class in front of you.” Furthermore, mentors were able to adapt the session as they went along based on the way the mentees were responding to the mentors, with one mentor reporting to the MYA school development officer - “I learnt things during the day. On one of the sessions there was parts when we were explaining it I could see from their faces they didn’t know what it meant, and from that it kind of helped me to explain to them in

detail and a bit differently what it actually is. I remember the feeling around having to dig a bit deeper and go off script.”

“The school has “Leadership” in its name, and this programme and what you have done has done exactly that. It’s been remarkable, I’d like to thank [school development officer] for the time and care he’s shown to us as a group of people, and I think that’s what changes the world. It makes me a funny type of pride, because it’s a pride with a sense of action, the world is in a funny place at the moment but it’s about change, I’m not quite sure I’ve seen any projects like MVP in 30 years of teaching, it’s amazing.” Head teacher, School 3 (MYA secondary data)

Mentors were also asked how they thought the mentees responded to the sessions. Mentors’ generally perceived mentees as responding really well to the sessions. One mentor felt the mentees found the concept of older students delivering the programme a bit strange a first but several mentors felt that the programme being delivered by peers, rather than teachers, was an advantage. Mentors’ noted that initially mentees were reluctant to speak but once they became more familiar with the mentors they became more confident in engaging. Mentors’ also discussed the use of strategies to encourage mentees to engage such as rephrasing questions during silences, using the interactive strategies to make mentees give their opinion (such as moving to different parts of the room in response to a scenario), and, asking some quieter mentees their opinion to ensure it is not just the same people speaking.

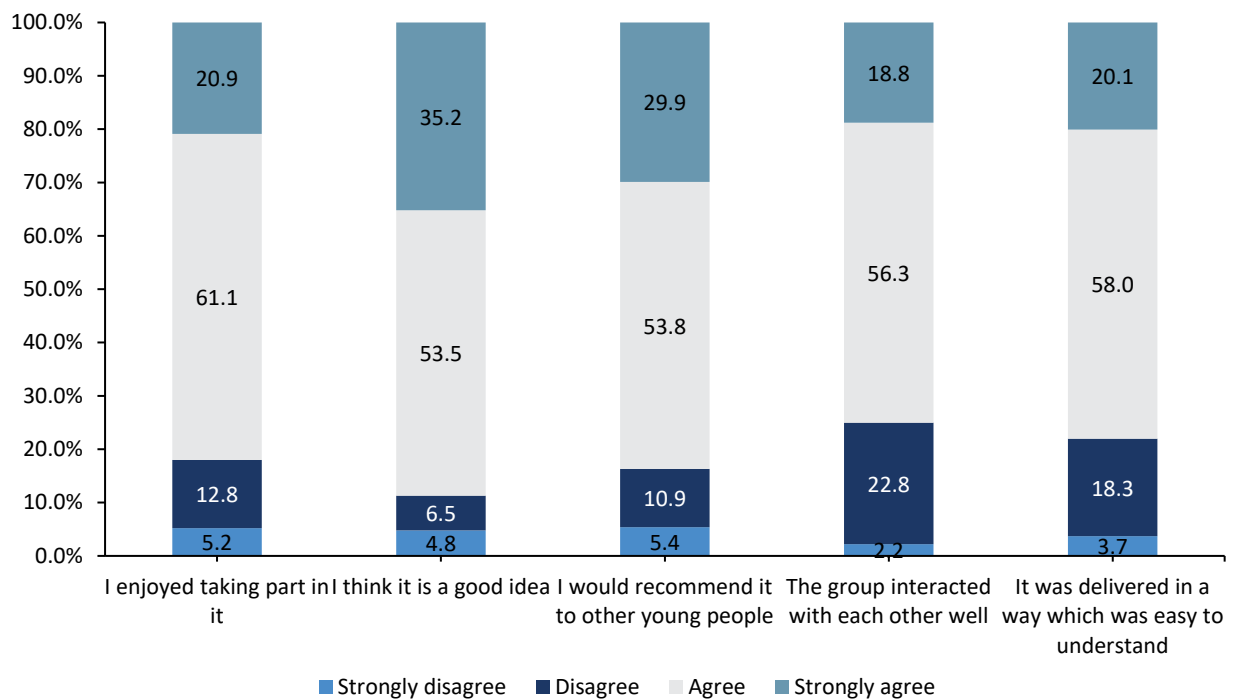
“We are telling them from our perspective, and because we are older we may have seen it. Like I said, they might listen to us more than a teacher.” Mentor, School 2 (Focus group 1)

“They have seen us a bit more so they are more likely to speak and stuff and we want them to speak a lot more. So now they are confident, so hopefully it means they speak a lot more in the next few sessions”. Mentor, School 2 (Focus group 1)

“The difficult bit is mostly trying to connect with them, especially the first time... Sometimes you ask a question, some groups never answer and you slow down and if there’s been a couple of them I’ll speak a lot instead. So we’re trying to eradicate awkwardness between us and them, try to build up a control and drive the quieter ones and like get them to have a say in the situation, instead of just the same people”. Mentor, School 2 (Focus group 1)

Findings from the mentee post programme survey demonstrated support and positive perceptions of the MVP programme. After taking part in the programme, mentees were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about the programme using a four point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Figure 12). The majority of mentees agreed⁴ that: they enjoyed taking part in it (82.0%; n=173), they thought it was a good idea (88.7%; n=204); and, the group interacted with each other well (75.0%; n=168). The majority of mentees also agreed that the programme was delivered in a way that was easy to understand (78.1%; n=171) and, they would recommend it to other young people (83.7%; n=185).

Figure 12: Mentees' perceptions of the MVP programme, post programme survey



Similar to the mentors' perceptions of the MVP training, when mentees were asked which parts of the programme they enjoyed or thought worked well, mentees reported enjoying the content of the programme, including learning about different types of violence and the bystander approach, and the mode of delivery such as the interactive group activities - "I think what really worked well was doing activities that got us moving, because it was fun and got the message across". Mentees also enjoyed the fact it was delivered by fellow students rather than teachers - "I enjoyed speaking to other students because they don't judge our opinions and understood if we had different opinions". Several mentees also commented on how well they got on with the mentors, and how confident and knowledgeable they were which made them feel confident in turn about speaking up. Most mentees said there was nothing they would change about the programme, however several said it could be improved by making it even more interactive and if more of the mentees got involved by answering questions and discussing the topics.

"Enjoyed having year 10 people in charge because they know what it is like to be a student."

Mentee, School 2 (Post programme survey)

"I thought that the fact that they were confident made us feel a bit more confident". Mentee, School 10 (Post programme survey)

"Racism was what I enjoyed. The year 10's explained it in a good way". Mentee, School 2 (Post programme survey)

"The way they set it out because it was really easy to understand". Mentee, School 10 (Post programme survey)

"Everyone was included, you could express your own opinion". Mentee, School 4 (Post programme survey)

3.4 Fidelity

In general the core programme content and implementation approach was the same as the original programme delivered in Scotland. The Scottish programme had already undergone several adaptations to the original MVP programme, for example by adapting the scenarios to make them relevant to the Scottish high school context and substituting American phrases for language more commonly used by the target population [4]. MYA also made a number of further adaptations to the programme content including inclusion of mental wellbeing and resilience components; identifying school specific issues and delivering optional modules based on these issues; and adaptation of the core content to the local Merseyside context. They also made adaptations to programme delivery based on individual school preferences and to deliver the programme within COVID-19 restrictions.

3.4.1 Programme content

All MVP programme resources which were used in the delivery of the programme in Scotland were provided to MYA development officers during their training. MYA staff took these core materials and resources and then made several adaptations to the content. Across all schools, adaptations were made to the core materials to make them relevant to the local Merseyside context. For example this included replacing Scottish figures on violence and crime with

“All the sessions are underpinned by the Resilience Framework”.
School development officer

Merseyside statistics. A member of the VRP provided MYA with a contact in Merseyside Police to liaise with for figures for knife crime and violence - “so I've done a lot of work with Merseyside VRP to get a lot of relevant up to date statistics and that's one thing as well that's nice when you train the mentors is when you put the statistic on the board and they're like oh my god is it the high”. The adaptation of the materials to the Merseyside context was considered a critical part of the effectiveness of the programme.

“Because I think one of the things about the stats for me was, it's the shock factor, you know, and I think it sort of gives the young people that buy in, like, this isn't just something that's happening in London, and isn't my business, yes. And then on my doorstep, but actually, I think what that then does is really highlights the need for a programme like MVP. So we're talking about knife crime, but we're talking about it in Liverpool City Centre, we're talking about it right, by your school, right by your home. And I think it brings the programme alive in a way and obviously young people, I think, to want to do more about it.” School development officer

In addition, MYA brought their expertise and background in developing resilience and increasing mental wellbeing in young people into the content of the programme - “I think the programme itself, it just gave a structure to how we would be delivering it. And I guess, because there's so much in it, it was just about understanding how the whole programme pulled together. But realistically, we got more information when we kind of like went away from the training and just thought about other aspects that would be relevant. And I think, it did raise a whole load of questions, because we're very much mental health focused, a lot of the programme was, was kind of like looking at strategies. And then we pulled a lot of our mental health knowledge and understanding within that programme as well.” As well as adding consideration of mental health issues and building resilience into the programme content, the school development officers also provided additional wrap around support and training opportunities to school staff in the area of mental health - “for the staff we've done specific training for the MVP schools around mental health awareness, spotting the signs and symptoms as a first line response to things like anxiety and depression, low mood suicide.”

From the outset, MYA staff attending the training felt there was opportunity to cover more topics than those included in the original programme materials and developed additional optional modules - “But then also looking at some of the modules on the training, I was like, Well, why hasn't that module been developed through like, there was no module on say like anxiety. There was no module around criminal exploitation, or suicide awareness, nothing around racism, or disability inclusion. I was like, well, why not? Yeah. You know, we need to build, we need to build those.” Development officers also sought to ensure that the topics which were covered in the three optional modules were the most relevant to the issues identified by staff and children within each school. MYA developed and distributed a survey to staff and students at each of the ten pilot schools to identify school specific topics of concern. Staff and students at each school were asked to select all issues which they perceived were a concern in their school from a pre-set list including: online abuse; friendship worries; bullying; abusive relationships; sexting; sexual harassment; violence; anxiety; weapon carry; homophobic bullying; transphobic bullying; racism; pornography; child sexual exploitation; drug dealing; alcohol and drugs; consent; feeling low; weight or body image; family problems; self-harm; sex; suicide; name calling; disability; and, other. Across all schools the top three concerns identified by young people were bullying, racism and anxiety and by staff were online abuse, controlling behaviour and rumours. MVP school staff and mentors were then shown the results of their school survey and asked which topics the optional modules should consist of (Table 1). The core structure of each of the sessions remained the same as the original programme materials, for example inclusion of scenario and discussions of possible actions that could be taken in response to each scenario. The structured nature of each session meant it was easily adaptable by MYA to cover other topics which had not been previously developed for inclusion in the programme (e.g. weight or body image). Finally, the session materials were adapted to ensure they fit with PHSE outcomes (see section 3.6.1).

3.4.2 Programme delivery

In general the programme was delivered in the same way across schools although there were some minor differences in how schools identified students as potential mentors, mode of training (in person or virtual) and year groups involved (Table 1).

Some schools used their own knowledge of pupils to select those they thought best fit the criteria for mentors, whilst other schools used an application process following an awareness raising assembly given by the school development officer which provided an overview of the programme (Table 1). However the school development officers reported that selecting the right young people to be mentors was crucial to the success of the programme and the application process wasn't necessarily the best way to do this - “so in both of my schools, and the staff selected the young people, and some school said they were going to do an application process. And my personal opinion on that was not too because the young people that we want on this programme are the influences within the old years that the young people will listen to, I think, quite often, you know, we want another programme or on peer mentoring, which is an application process. And you do get your high achievers, you know, your well behaved young people, and absolutely don't necessarily want that on MVP.”

The mode of delivery for staff and mentor training also differed across schools (Table 1), however this was often due to COVID-19 restrictions and concerns rather than school level preferences - “in every session there is an icebreaker and loads of icebreakers weren't COVID friendly, and it was all like mingling with each other. And so they've all been adapted now, so they're more COVID social distance friendly.” School development officers recommended that ideally all training would be completed face-to-face rather than virtually, however, felt the virtual training still worked well - “we were

thinking about, you know, how it's always going to be best face-to-face, yes. The best training that we did were the face-to-face ones, and those members of staff were taking it all on board, however saying that, the online version worked really well as well.”

3.5 Dose and reach

All schools across Merseyside were provided with an overview of the MVP programme by the VRP and invited to make expressions of interest to be one of the ten schools involved in the pilot. Ten schools (two schools from each Local Authority on Merseyside) were then chosen by the VRP to take part in the pilot MVP programme during the 2020/21 academic year. By the end of the 2020/21 academic year:

- **18 school staff from nine schools** received the two day MVP **training** from MYA school development officers;
- **147 mentors from nine schools** received the two day MVP **training** from MYA school development officers;
- **111 mentors from seven schools** commenced **delivery** of the programme to mentees;
- **Approximately 830 mentees from seven schools** received **at least one session**; and,
- **Approximately 330 mentees from two schools** received **all five sessions**.

A breakdown of the dose and reach of the programme within each school is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: MVP programme dose and reach by school, MYA secondary data

School	Staff training complete	Number of staff trained	Mentor training complete	Number of mentors trained	Number of mentors implementing sessions	Number of mentees	MVP sessions delivered				
							Core 1	Core 2	Optional 1	Optional 2	Optional 3
1	✓	2	✓	9	0	0					
2	✓	2	✓	9	9	~90	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	✓	2	✓	7	7	~80	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4	✓	2	✓	21	21	~240	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	✓	3	✓	25	0	0					
6	✓	2	✓	10	9	~90	✓				
7	✓	2	✓	5	4	~30	✓				
8	✓	1	✓	6	6	~60	✓	✓	✓		
9	<i>MVP programme not implemented in the 2020/21 academic year</i>										
10	✓	2	✓	55	55	~240	✓	✓	✓		

3.6 Facilitators and barriers to programme implementation

3.6.1 Facilitating factors to programme implementation

This section discusses the factors which facilitated the implementation of the MVP programme in the ten pilot schools. School development officers and school staff identified a number of facilitating factors to programme implementation including:

Support from the Merseyside VRP: The VRP were responsible initially for a number of factors related to programme implementation including procuring and funding MYA to deliver MVP, promoting the programme to all schools to gauge interest, identifying two schools from each LA to take part and, engaging with the head teacher of pilot schools and asking them to select the school staff team. Further as already discussed the VRP was able to provide local information and statistics on violence across Merseyside, which MYA were able to use in their adaptation of the programme content to the local context. In addition a key facilitating factor was having regular meetings with the VRP education lead. This facilitated communication between MYA and the wider VRP on progress of implementation and where necessary the VRP education lead was able to liaise with schools which were more difficult for MYA to engage with - "I'm struggling with two schools that aren't on board [the education lead] took that on for me and is trying to get those schools on board. I've never had that before in previous roles, where you know, we've been given money to do a project I do think it's great to have him on board supporting."

Programme alignment with PSHE curriculum: school development officers and the VRP education lead viewed the adaptation of the programme to align with the priorities and goals of PSHE curriculum as important and key in increasing buy in from schools as well as facilitating MVP in mentor and mentee timetables (as time would have needed to be allocated to PSHE anyway) - "How can we relate it to not only our local area, but the whole teaching process and PSHE lessons? Yeah, the curriculum, how that all kind of like works together. So the programme then became really palatable. And yeah, it was a good, dare I say, selling point to the schools, because it covers quite a lot of their priorities as well."

Delivery and oversight of programme implementation by an external organisation: It was felt that the school development officers' background and experience as youth workers was a key facilitating factor in being able to establish relationships with the mentors. Their role as an external individual (i.e. not a teacher) was perceived to allow mentors the freedom to express their thoughts and feelings about gender stereotypes and violence without fear of getting in trouble with a teacher - "we've come in maybe like a youth worker role so I think if it was teachers delivering the sessions, you know I'm not saying this for every school, but I know personally if I had the teacher in a room I probably wouldn't open up or give my honest opinion because I'd be scared. You know when we were doing the gender box activity when there was a teacher in the room some of the girls came to me after and said can I say this word and it might have been like slag or slut and I'm like yeah that's what we want but they were so scared to say when the teacher was there. So we say that to the teachers when we do these activities that we want their honest opinion because if we don't dig deep to see what they're thinking it's never going to be beneficial and so I do definitely think it's great to have an external provider come in and then we're sort of the link between the kids and the school if that makes sense". The sessions are very much participatory and the aim is to make the mentors feel in charge of delivery, thus a 'teacher' type approach is not appropriate. Further, an external

"I feel like we would have felt uncomfortable with a teacher because of the subject." Mentor, School 6 (Focus group)

organisation delivering the staff and mentor training meant the school had to commit less time to set up of the programme and in recent circumstances with the added work load on teachers due to COVID-19 restrictions this was also a key facilitating factor.

“The link with [school development officer] worked brilliantly well. They supported our staff and students throughout they were always available whenever we needed help and they had a real impact on the mentors. They felt valued throughout the programme and had an input on the materials delivered to the mentees.” School staff member, School 3 (Staff survey)

3.6.2 Barriers to programme implementation

The major significant barrier to programme implementation was COVID-19 and the closure of schools during various parts of the 20/21 school year. Whilst this had an impact on timelines for delivery of the programme, school development officers were able to continue some parts of programme implementation virtually, for example online training for school staff and mentors. Programme delivery of MVP by the mentors to the mentees could not however take place online thus this was paused until schools reopened. Aside from direct issues caused by COVID-19 it was also felt that the interruption to the school year may have increased the work load on staff involved in the programme and had an impact on staff communication with the school development officers. The education lead from the VRP was able to speak to schools directly on a number of occasions when communication between the school and MYA had stopped and this overcame some difficulties. “They’re our priority, but we’re not their priority. So for us as much it’s like, how much do you push and communicate with the school? Because you don’t want to go too much?”

3.7 Areas for development and sustainability

Recognition for mentors: A key element that was felt by the school development officers to be missing from the pilot programme was some form of formal recognition for the mentors for the work they had done and what they had achieved. It was suggested this could take the form of an event that the mentors ran and presented their work to the school, families and other stakeholders, and include a presentation to the mentors of some form of certificate etc. “But in the next round of MVP, I’d love to have a sort of thing in the diary where we can bring all of those schools together and you know, get some key decision makers in the room and actually let the young people run that service. Let them get up and talk about what they’ve been up to and what they’ve been doing and the impact it’s had. And because I think that’s a nice close to the programme as well. Once the whole thing’s been delivered, so I’d like to see that happen as well. And then we’re going to get them all a hoodie. So when they deliver, and they can wear an MVP hoodie and like a little badge. Like an event like that creates a buzz? And you look forward to it, don’t you as a young person? Because essentially, the nights all about you and celebrating you and what you’ve done.”

Development of the programme content: School development officers spoke about how there was potential to develop additional optional modules on other topics not currently covered in the programme such as COVID-19 and adverse childhood experiences - “and certainly, this year, we will look at developing more modules. You know, the one I’ve got my eye on next is around adverse childhood experiences. Maybe the issues COVID brought, but you can’t do everything all in the first go. So that will be amongst the development the next year. So certainly, in terms of creating new modules is important.” Furthermore whilst some adaptations had been made to the Scottish materials to make them relevant to the Merseyside context (e.g. inclusion of local figures on violent crime), school development officers reported that school staff felt there was need for additional adaptation

for example to videos that were used in the resources which include Scottish children - “one thing I think for us would probably be more money for our actual resources here. Like I said before videos would be great if we had our own stamp on videos because some videos are like American or Scottish and the accent might be quite hard for the young people to understand because that's one thing that I had from teachers at [school 5], they said so have you got any other videos because I just don't think this is gonna work with our young people.”

Broadening out the programme to more schools and the wider community. All of the school development officers spoke about broadening the reach of the programme in the future. This included roll out to a wider number of schools across Merseyside however, school development officers spoke about the opportunity and benefit of broadening out the programme to community groups (e.g. youth clubs, sports teams) where it was felt it would also work really well, in addition to making student's parents and carers aware of the programme and it's values. It was perceived that many young people came from complex backgrounds and they reported that their parents and families often had the attitudes to gender and violence that MVP advocates against - “I think sort of community wise it'd be ideal what we really want to do going forward is get the parents and the families on board. So I know obviously the letters go back but wouldn't it just be amazing to have these conversations because somebody said in one of my sessions this is great but like what if you come from a home where the word gay is used all the time and racist language issues all the time. Yeah so how do we change those things that are going on at home? So I think that's something going forward that would be great to do to include the family because of a whole school approach is not just teachers and kids it is the parents as well.”

MVP network: School development officers felt there was the opportunity to develop a network between schools of mentors and those engaged in the MVP programme to share experiences and learning - “But I think for me, a missing piece of the jigsaw is around like network meeting, network meetings amongst staff across the schools, because I think that even if it's, you know, just once a term. So we're not asking for loads of the time, it's an hour once a term for those staff involved and MVP to come together to just talk about what's going well, and what and what they need further support with because we're also working on our own isolated pods at the moment. Yeah, I think there's a real opportunity to bring people together across the schools to see what learning is taking place, what any good news stories or, you know, any further support they want from us.” An online forum called Dialogue is currently been considered by the VRP to facilitate this.

Embedding the MVP culture and ethos in the whole school: School development officers felt that delivery of an awareness session on MVP prior to programme roll-out in schools would help to overcome some of the barriers with staff communication and ensure the most appropriate staff were recruited to support programme implementation. Thus rather than the head teacher selecting the staff (as done in the current pilot), staff could identify themselves as interested in the programme and having the necessary qualities to support implementation. Such awareness raising sessions would also provide students with an overview of the programme, so that those identified as potential mentors knew what the training was about before attending. Whilst the retention rate of mentors in the training was very high (~94%), eight students identified to take part in the training did not wish to continue it, thus an overview of the programme for students prior to selecting mentors would reduce dropout rates. However even students who dropped out and did not wish to deliver the MVP sessions were included in some other type of activity by the school development officers - “a young girl who came on day one absolutely loved it and then when we started talking about getting up and delivering the sessions she said she just couldn't. She was so overwhelmed with her anxiety and then didn't come

the second day so then that's when I had a conversation with her and the teacher saying well do you want to do behind the scenes then? Do you want to help me sort of plan the sessions or help me do the social media if that's something that you'd prefer to do. So I think it's about where can we include that mentor based on what their strengths are". It was also suggested, and some work had begun on this in the pilot, that simultaneous to MVP programme delivery to mentees, mentors would do wider school awareness raising activities on MVP's core messages to develop a whole school understanding and culture around using bystander approaches to signify and challenge incidents of unacceptable behaviour in an easier and less confrontational manner - "But I think in the future, I'd love to see that start to ripple out into the rest of the school. And one of the ideas that my people from my school have was around running a bit of a campaign within school that was led by them around violence prevention that would target everybody. And I think, you know, it's still on my mind, now think that's a genius idea of how to get that ripple, bigger, and the rest of the school. And the key with that, you know, I'd love, love, love, love to bring the influencers together across all the groups, you know, get the cocky ones, the loud ones, get them all in a room and talk to them about MVP, because actually, I think if we can bring them on board and change their perception, then they can go and ripple that out into their year groups as well. I think there's definitely scope for it because at the moment, it is just targeted work for those two year groups." Furthermore, MYA felt there needed to be communication materials produced which could be used to promote the programme and encourage other schools to sign up to take part in the future. A website (<https://educationmvp.co.uk/about/background/>) has now been developed and promotional videos with mentors talking about their experience of the programme have also been produced.

Train-the-trainer approach: MVP by nature is a train-the-trainer type model. School development officers were trained by an individual experienced in training and implementation from Scotland, they then trained the teachers and mentors, and mentors deliver the same programme to mentees. MYA development officers saw this as an opportunity to create a sustainable approach to programme delivery within schools. The expectation is that trained school staff will be able to continue to support implementation of the programme in the future, with minimal support and involvement from the school development officers. This would include the training of any new cohorts of mentors. The majority of staff participating in the staff survey agreed⁴ with the statements: 'I would like to see the MVP programme continue to be delivered in my school' (100%; n=5) and 'I would feel confident training new cohorts of mentors and supporting them to implement the MVP programme in the future' (80%; n=4). However this was a small sample and further research is needed to understand if and how, school staff continue to support the implementation of MVP in the next academic year. One suggestion to streamline the process of training new mentors was that when mentees entered Key Stage 4 they could undertake the mentor training and deliver the programme to a new cohort of mentees in Key Stage 3, whilst mentors experienced in delivering the programme may be able to support the delivery of the mentor training to these former mentees - "every time a year group gets into year 10 they already know about MVP and they might want to be mentors so they then get trained up and then every time we go to get like a new year 7 it just continues and then if those mentors from year 10 are in the school till year 11 they might not always be mentors they might just be helping us train the new mentors."

3.8 Impacts on mentors

3.8.1 Changes in leadership skills

There was an increase in the proportion of mentors agreeing with each statement on leadership from the pre to post training survey. Compared to the pre training survey, a higher proportion of mentors in the post training survey agreed⁴ with the statements: 'I see myself as a leader' (pre, 65.0%, n=91; post, 71.8%, n=94); 'I see myself as a role model to younger students' (pre, 75.7%, n=106; post, 77.9%, n=102); and, 'I think others see me as a role model to younger students' (pre, 58.6%, n=82; post, 67.2%, n=86; Figure 13).

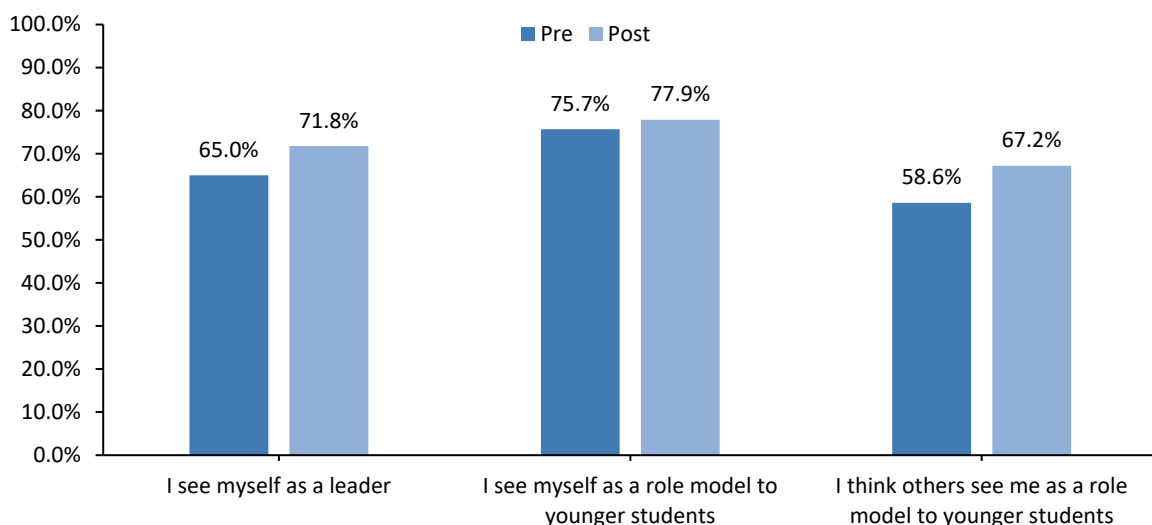
"What makes a good leader? Confidence, able to talk seriously, listen to everyone, loud, well spoken, sensible, understanding, sympathy, maturity, independence, humility. They have to have these qualities to be a good leader and to be there for other people when they need them. You have to be here for each other and be able to be there for them." Mentor, School 8 (MYA secondary data)

Of mentors for whom pre and post training matched data was available, there was a statistically significant increase in mentors' mean level of agreement from pre to post training with the statement 'I think others see me as a role model to younger students' (pre mean=3.60; post mean=3.80; $p < 0.05$; $n = 128$). The statements 'I see myself as a leader' and 'I see myself as a role model to younger students' also showed an increase in the mean level of agreement but was not statistically significant.

"Be a shepherd not a sheep." Mentor, School 2 (MYA secondary data)

"I'm thinking specifically of one mentor. And he had difficulties and he was selected. And I think it was more about the head teacher said you know what this guy would be coming out of school with very little as far as academic ability, what I'm seeing from here is that, you know, he has personified what this school is all about. We're training people up to be leaders of which he is." School development officer

Figure 13: Proportion of mentors agreeing with each statement on leadership, pre and post training surveys



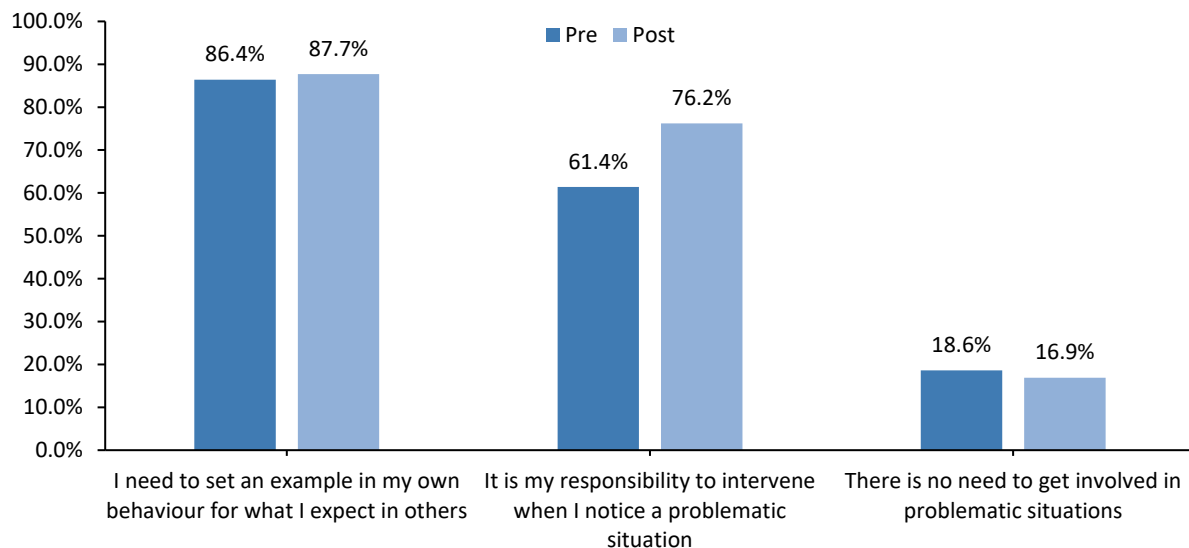
3.8.2 Changes in bystander knowledge and attitudes

There was an increase in the proportion of mentors agreeing with each statement related to bystander knowledge and attitudes from the pre to post training survey. Compared to the pre training survey, a higher proportion of mentors in the post training survey agreed⁴ with the statements: 'I need to set an example in my own behaviour for what I expect in others' (pre, 86.4%, n=121; post, 87.7%, n=114); and, 'it is my responsibility to intervene when I notice a problematic situation (pre, 61.4%, n=86; post, 76.2%, n=99; Figure 14). There was a decrease in the number of mentors who agreed with the statement 'there is no need to get involved in problematic situations (pre, 18.6%, n=26; post, 16.9%, n=22; Figure 14).

Of mentors for whom pre and post training matched data was available, there was a statistically significant increase in mentors' mean level of agreement from pre to post training with the statement 'it is my responsibility to intervene when I notice a problematic situation' (pre mean=3.72; post mean=3.93; $p < 0.05$; $n = 130$). There was also an increase in the mean level of agreement with the statement 'I need to set an example in my own behaviour for what I expect in others' and a decrease in the mean level of agreement with the statement 'there is no need to get involved in problematic situations' however these changes were not statistically significant.

"Made me aware of what's going on, if something's going wrong or someone is mistreating someone in the group, I now know about the bystander approach and I'd say something now." Mentor, School 3
(MYA secondary data)

Figure 14: Proportion of mentors agreeing with each statement on bystander behaviours, pre and post training surveys



“Yeah, I think my little hypothesis would be that straight after the delivery, there would be an impact in terms of challenging behaviour and your own behaviour as well. I think it would make young people think twice about saying that comment or doing that action. And I think there's depth of something there. But I'd love to just say just be a fly on the wall. Because, particularly for the mentors, you can see it in them, like, even on the training. And, you know, they laugh and joke, and one of them is like, Oh, shut your mouth [student] or they say stuff and they'll go excuse me, 'MVP' don't speak to [student] like that. Ah, yeah, and it's just so like, even though the joking they are little nuggets of the impact that the programme's having.” School

development officer

3.8.3 Changes in violence prevention knowledge and attitudes

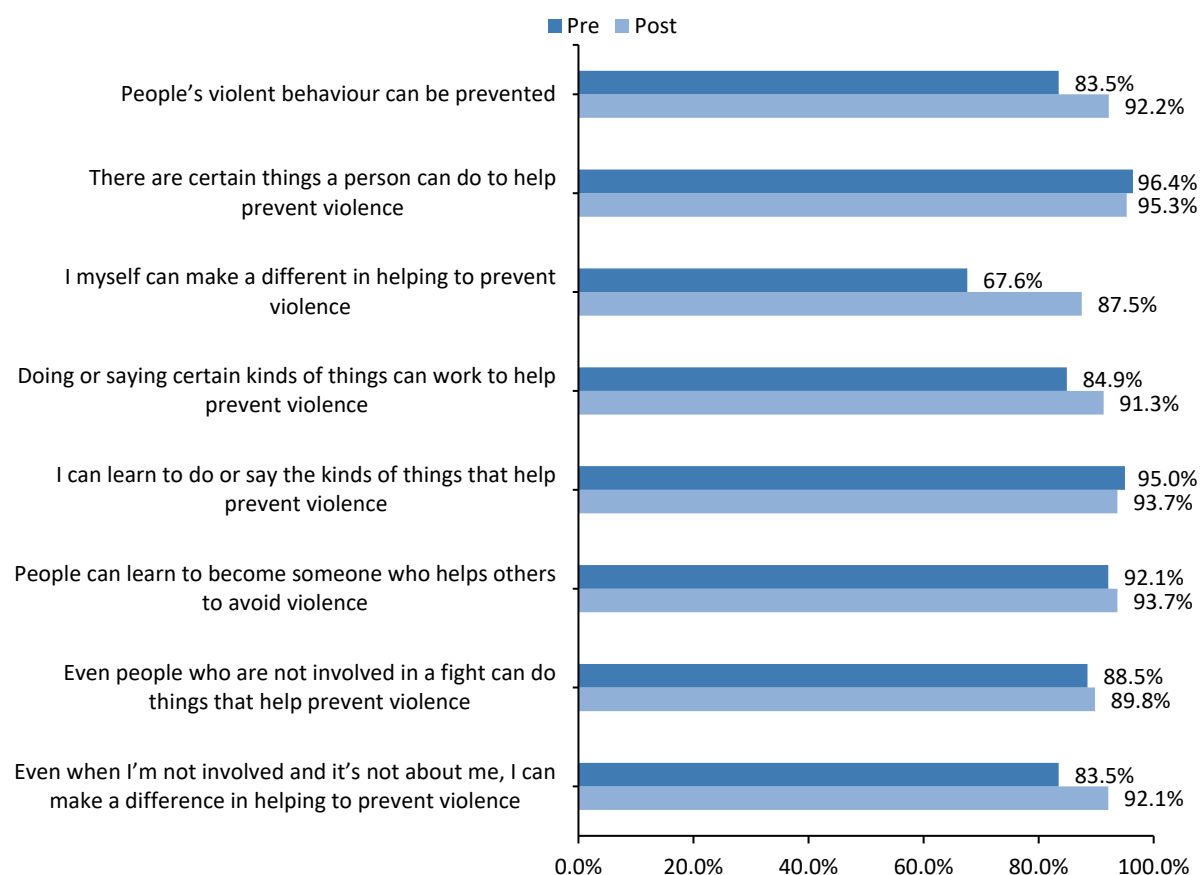
For most statements related to violence prevention knowledge and attitudes, there was an increase in the proportion of mentors agreeing with each statement from the pre to post training survey. Compared to the pre training survey, a higher proportion of mentors in the post training survey agreed⁴ with the statements about the preventability of violence including: ‘people’s violent behaviour can be prevented’ (pre, 83.5%, n=116; post, 92.2%, n=118); and, ‘doing or saying certain kinds of things can work to help prevent violence’ (84.9%, n=118; post, 91.3%, n=116; Figure 15). A higher proportion of mentors in the post training survey also agreed with the statement ‘I myself can make a difference in helping to prevent violence’ (pre, 67.6%, n=94; post, 87.5%, n=112), and that ‘people can learn to become someone who helps others to avoid violence’ (pre, 92.1%, n=128; post, 93.7%, n=119; Figure 15). Compared to the pre training survey, a higher proportion of mentors in the post training survey also agreed with statements regarding a bystander approach to violence prevention: ‘even people who are not involved in a fight can do things that help prevent violence’ (pre, 88.5%, n=123; post, 89.8%, n=114); and, ‘even when I’m not involved and it’s not about me, I can make a difference in helping to prevent violence’ (pre, 83.5%, n=116; post, 92.1%, n=116; Figure 15).

Of mentors for whom pre and post training matched data was available, there was a statistically significant increase in mentors’ mean level of agreement from pre to post training with the statements: ‘I myself can make a difference in helping to prevent violence’ (pre mean=3.80; post mean=4.16; $p<0.001$; n=128); ‘people’s violent behaviour can be prevented’ (pre mean=4.07; post mean=4.30; $p<0.05$; n=128); ‘doing or saying certain kinds of things can work to help prevent violence’ (pre mean=4.05; post mean=4.22; $p<0.05$; n=127); and, ‘even when I’m not involved and it’s not about me, I can make a difference in helping to prevent violence’ (pre mean=4.00; post mean=4.27; $p<0.001$; n=126). All other statements related to violence prevention also showed an increase in the mean level of agreement but these were not statistically significant.

“I think it’s important to teach people who don’t really know much about why their behaviour is wrong, they need to know why it’s wrong about things like abuse, maybe they’ve been brought up in that way so they are just used to it, but they need to know it’s not right.”

Mentor, School 2 (MYA secondary data)

Figure 15: Proportion of mentors agreeing with each statement on violence prevention, pre and post training surveys



3.8.4 Other impacts

All staff who took part in the staff survey agreed⁴ that the programme had a positive impact on mentors (100%; n=5). Qualitative feedback in the staff survey on the impact of the programme on mentors showed most staff felt greater confidence, communication and leadership skills were some of the most significant impacts of the programme on the mentors. Further, involvement in the programme supported better communication and engagement with the parents of a mentor who was previously having problems - "Pupils and their families know they are thought highly of in school. One student delivering the programme is on report for behaviour. Usually parents are not supportive, but since she has been leading on the MVP programme, parents are supporting the school."

"Greater confidence, maturity and empathy. Mentors felt empowered to speak to young students and deliver some challenging topics. They have developed their communication skills and have discovered that their message has been listened to. After their final session of the year many of the mentors commented on how much they had enjoyed the experience and that they were amazed by the fact that they were capable of being mentors to the younger students"

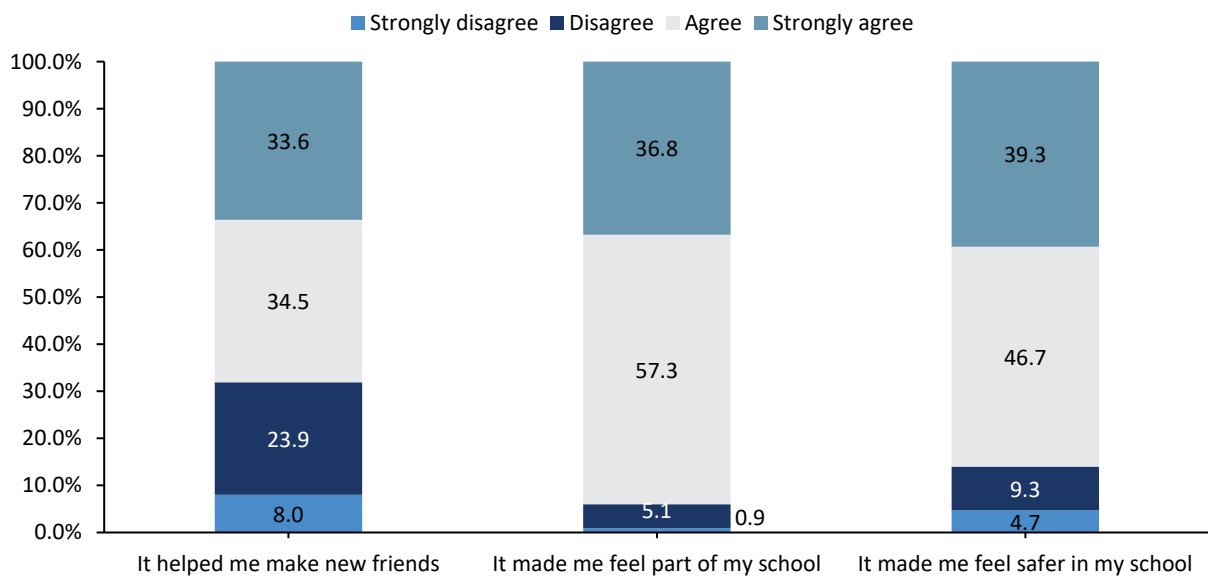
School staff member, School 7 (Staff survey)

After taking part in the MVP training, mentors were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about the impact the training had using a four point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Figure 16). The majority of mentors agreed that it made them feel part of their

school (94.0%; n=110) and safer in their school (86.0%; n=92). Almost seven in 10 (68.1%; n=77) mentors agreed that the training had helped them make new friends (Figure 16).

“It was easy for me to get involved as it took my mind off everything. The programme was good, the best thing about it was working in a group with people that I don’t usually hang around with.” Mentor, School 3 (MYA secondary data)

Figure 16: Mentors’ perceptions of impact of training, post training survey

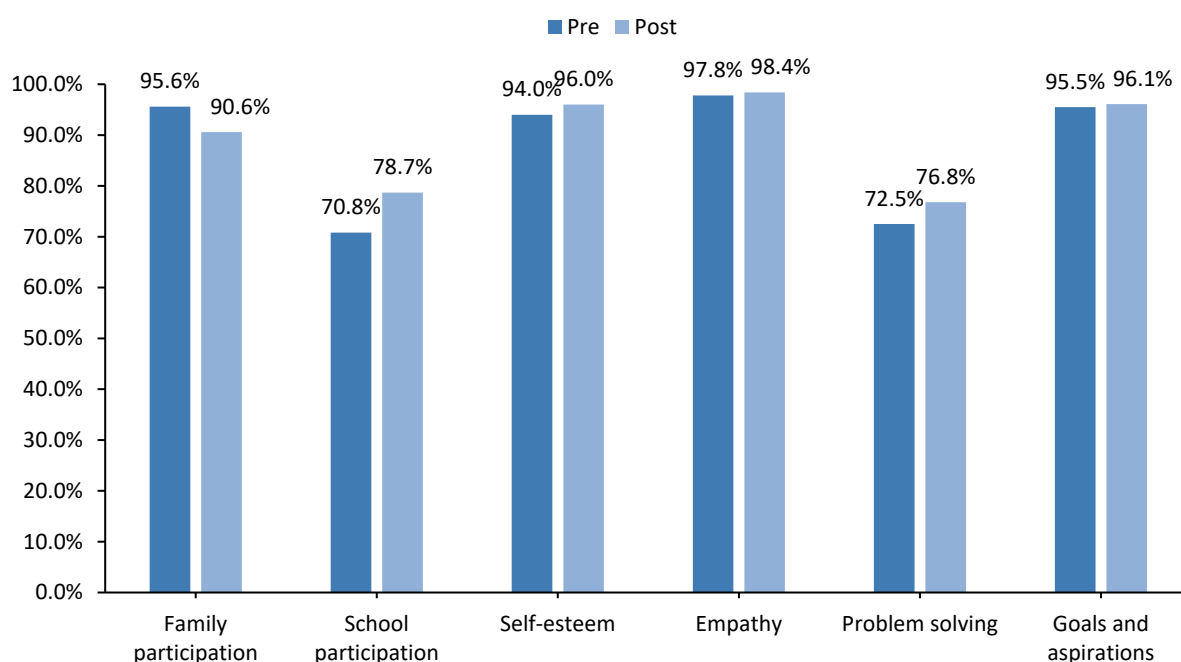


There was an increase in the proportion of mentors who had moderate or high scores on most of the resilience measures from pre to post training (Figure 17). Compared to the pre training survey, a higher proportion of mentors, had high or moderate scores in the post training survey on: school participation (pre, 70.8%, n=92; post, 78.7%, n=96); self-esteem (pre, 94.0%, n=125; post, 96.0%, n=119), empathy (pre, 97.8%, n=131; post, 98.4%, n=123); problem solving (pre, 72.5%, n=95; post, 76.8%, n=96); and, goals and aspirations (pre, 95.5%, n=128; post, 96.1%, n=122; Figure 17).

“MVP supports wellbeing.”
Mentor, School 5
(MYA secondary data)

Of mentors for whom pre and post training matched data was available, there was a statistically significant increase in mentors’ mean scores from pre to post training on the school participation resilience measure (pre mean=2.84; post mean=3.06; p<0.01; n=119). All other resilience measures also showed an increase in the mean score but these were not statistically significant.

Figure 17: Mentors' score on resilience measures, pre and post training surveys



3.9 Impacts on mentees

All staff who took part in the staff survey agreed⁴ that the programme had a positive impact on mentees (100%; n=5). Qualitative feedback in the staff survey on the impact of the programme on mentees showed staff felt mentees increased their knowledge and understanding of the topics and seemed to enjoy the concept of the sessions being implemented by their older peers - “the mentees responded brilliantly to the sessions and they really enjoyed being ‘taught’ by other students rather than staff. After one session a year 7 remarked that it was the ‘best lesson’ they had ever had”.

“I have heard some of the pupils who are being mentored talk about the MVP programme and what they have learnt on the yard at lunch time” School staff member, School 10 (Staff survey)

Mentors reported that some of the mentees had come to recognise them around the school, outside of the MVP sessions, and felt this could be a way for mentees to get support from them if they did not want to talk to an adult. Mentors also felt that an aim of the programme was to increase mentees’ confidence, so they can challenge behaviour and to do this they needed to help them become confident in engaging in the sessions - “the programme isn’t just about like, teaching them about violence and bystander, but maybe it’s about, like helping them be confident in the same way as it helped us. I think it increases your confidence.”

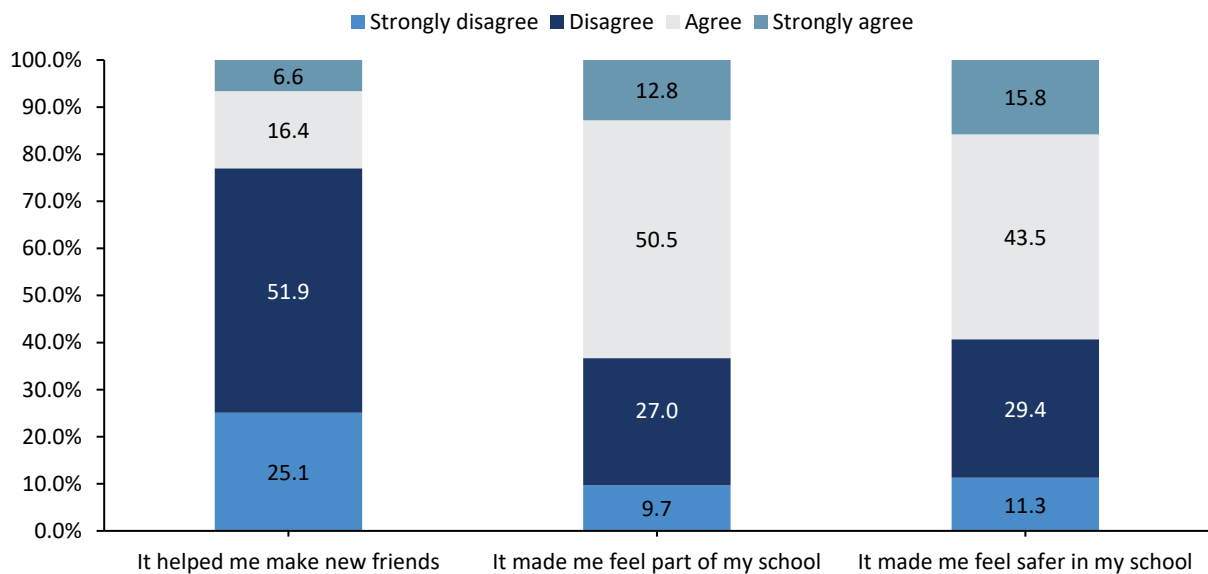
“Because it's like, although still kids ourselves and we're still in school, like students, they know that we know what we are talking about kind of. But if they didn't want to go to an adult, they want to go somewhere, someone more their age. They just go oh, let's go find [mentor]. Yeah, we'll go to him because he knows what he's doing. He knows what he's talking about.” Mentor,

School 2 (Focus group)

“Trying to get them to open up can be hard but like they're saying, you are not going to tell the teacher? Yeah, we're not teachers. We're basically the same age as you. We've been through what you're going through. We probably know what somebody's going through. So just let us know, we're trying to help.” Mentor, School 6 (Focus group)

After taking part in the MVP programme, mentees were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about the impact the programme had using a four point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Figure 18). Six in ten mentees agreed that it made them feel part of their school (63.3%; n=124) and safer in their school (69.3%; n=105). Almost one quarter (23.0%; n=42) of mentees agreed that the programme had helped them make new friends (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Mentees’ perceptions of impact of programme, post programme survey



4. Summary of key findings

As part of a range of activities to develop, promote and sustain a whole system public health approach to violence prevention, in 2020/21 the Merseyside VRP funded programmes, including the development and piloting of the school-based Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme. MVP is a school-based violence prevention programme, with a particular emphasis on gender-based violence, which aims to increase non-violent bystander intervention through a peer education approach to inform and empower individuals to become proactive bystanders in the face of violence. MVP was implemented in ten pilot schools across Merseyside during the 2020/21 academic year. This report presented the findings from a process and outcome evaluation of the pilot MVP programme to document and describe the implementation of the programme, including dose and reach, barriers and facilitators to implementation, sustainability and development, and impacts of the programme.

Fidelity and adaptation of the MVP programme to the Merseyside context

The MVP programme was developed and first implemented in the United States for professional and college sports teams and the original programme contained American terminology and sporting references [2]. Programme content, materials and training (for the school development officers) for the Merseyside MVP pilot was provided by MVP Scotland. The Scottish programme had already undergone several adaptations to the original MVP programme, including for example adapting the scenarios to make them relevant to the Scottish high school context and substituting American phrases for language more commonly used by the target population [4]. Further adaptation to the programme delivery and content was also made by MYA prior to implementation in Merseyside. This included taking a flexible approach to delivery of the programme (e.g. face-to-face and virtual training sessions), although this was more a necessity of COVID-19 restrictions than design, and face-to-face training was the preferred approach by school development officers. Crucially, adaptation was also made to the content of the programme including the addition of mental wellbeing and resilience components to each session, developing additional optional modules on a wider range of topics (e.g. child sexual exploitation, suicide awareness, racism), and adapting the core materials to make them relevant to the local context (e.g. adding Merseyside figures on violence and crime, provided by the VRP). In a review of the literature on bystander approaches to violence prevention, Fenton and colleagues [17, 18] emphasise that in order for bystander approaches to be effective, they must be both theory-driven and comprehensive, but also socio-culturally relevant. MYA were able to make adaptations to the programme to ensure it fit the local context, whilst also keeping this within the MVP delivery framework (i.e. the structure of each session remained the same), and most importantly retaining the theoretical basis of the programme and its focus on gender norms and bystander behaviour. This approach is also in line with recommended best practice on intervention implementation, with Durlak and DuPre [19] arguing for a compromise position which asserts that assessments of fidelity should focus on core intervention activities, while less central components can be altered to achieve ecological fit.

Another benefit from the adaptations MYA made to the programme was the opportunity to align the content with relevant national and international guidance and strategies for school-based violence prevention and relationship education. For example, much of the original content of MVP addresses issues related to relationships and sex education; topics which are core components of the Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) curriculum that schools are expected to deliver. The adaptations MYA made to the content of the programme, particularly the inclusion of mental health and resilience and additional topics for optional modules (e.g. controlling behaviour) further added to the

programme's relevance to PSHE curriculum. The alignment with PSHE curriculum was considered by school development officers and the VRP education lead as a key selling point to schools as it meant that MVP could be accommodated in students' timetables (during time allocated to PSHE lessons) and some of the responsibility and resource needed to deliver PSHE curriculum could be assigned to MYA and reduce the burden on school staff. Furthermore, training school staff in MVP, with its focus on gender-based violence prevention, aligns with global UNESCO best practice guidance for preventing school-related gender-based violence through training of staff to ensure schools are safe and supportive, and incidents of gender-based violence are handled appropriately [20].

Delivery of the programme

Ten secondary schools across Merseyside were chosen to take part in the pilot MVP programme during the academic year 2020/21. At the time of writing, implementation had begun in nine out of the ten schools with:

- 18 school staff, from nine schools having received the two day MVP training from the MYA school development officers;
- 147 mentors from nine schools having received the two day MVP training from MYA school development officers;
- 111 mentees from seven schools having commenced delivery of the programme to mentees;
- Approximately 830 mentees from seven schools having received at least one session; and,
- Approximately 330 mentees from two schools having received all five sessions.

Programme implementation was originally envisaged to have been complete (i.e. all schools have staff and mentors trained and delivered the minimum five MVP sessions to mentees) by March 2021. However COVID-19 and associated school closures at various points of the 2020/21 academic year caused significant disruption to implementation. Despite this, school development officers were still able to complete some staff and mentor training virtually. This meant that when schools reopened programme implementation with mentees was ready to begin. However, even once schools reopened, there was still some difficulties with communication and engagement with some schools. The additional workload on staff and other priorities when children returned to school was perceived by the school development officers to be a factor in these communication problems. However, the VRP education lead was able to support communication between the school and school development officers and by the end of the 2020/21 academic year only one of the ten pilot schools had not started any part of implementation, and seven schools had begun delivery of the sessions to mentees.

School development officers reported that a key mediating factor for the successful implementation and impact of the programme was identifying who were the best school staff to support the programme and which students had the qualities necessary to be good mentors. Each school head teacher was asked to identify two staff to be trained and support the implementation of MVP. School development officers felt that providing an overview of the programme to school staff prior to the decision about which staff should attend the training would be the best way of identifying the most appropriate staff. Ideally the staff team needed to be interested in the programme and supportive of its theoretical basis (i.e. bystander and gender-based approach), have the authority to allow students time within their timetables to attend training, the additional refresher sessions, and implement the programme, and, have a good relationship with, and knowledge of the students. Whilst there were differences in the way pilot schools identified which students should be trained as mentors, school development officers reported that the best way of doing this was by having a staff member who had good relationships with, and knowledge of, the students, identify who would be suitable mentors, rather than asking students to apply to or put themselves forward. School development officers

reported that asking students to apply may exclude the 'below the radar' students the mentor training was aimed at. Specifically the mentor role is not designed for the already high achieving students, who get involved in lots of extra-curriculum activities. School development officers emphasised that mentors should be confident leaders and ideally part of the in-group whom both their peers and younger students could look up to and who had the credibility to deliver MVP's core messages. This is key to the peer learning model because research shows that behavioural responses are shaped by the perceived social norms of fellow group members [21]. Therefore, the fact that mentors are in the same social group as mentees (i.e. fellow students) is designed to qualify them as representative of group norms and therefore credible in delivering messages and information on how to think and act in particular situations [4]. Emerging evidence from the evaluation to date suggests students who were selected by school staff as mentors had these attributes. For example, prior to receiving the training the majority of mentors perceived themselves as a leader (69.4%) and a role model to younger students (75.8%), however, less mentors believed that other people saw them as a role model to younger students (54.8%). This suggests that whilst mentors believed in their own ability to lead and be role models, they acknowledged they weren't necessarily the students that came to the attention of others as being able to fulfil that type of role (i.e. not in obvious leadership positions like prefects).

One of the key perceived facilitating factors was the use of an external organisation, supported by the VRP, in leading the development and implementation of the programme. Specifically, school development workers reported that the use of youth workers, rather than teachers, to deliver the training to mentors facilitated a more equal relationship. This allowed mentors to discuss sensitive or taboo topics and express their feelings and behaviours regarding them more openly and honestly than perhaps would have been possible with someone in a more authoritarian role like a teacher. This is consistent with findings from a study of MVP in Swedish high schools which used teachers to deliver the MVP sessions and found that teachers struggled with some elements of the programme [22]. Specifically, MVP works by presenting scenarios (e.g. witnessing bullying) and asking a series of open questions and facilitating a discussion. The aim is not to necessarily impart knowledge but to use the process of jointly discussing potential answers to these questions to influence attitudes and behaviours. It is the process of discussion and demonstration of 'norms' which is more crucial than imparting specific knowledge of what to do in that scenario. In this way, youth workers may be more acceptable as members of an 'in-group' than teachers to the mentors, in the same way mentors delivering the sessions to mentees makes the messages more credible. Findings from the Swedish study concluded that teachers find these open discussions difficult as it is in opposition to traditional teaching techniques that provide answers to the students [22]. Another possible advantage to the programme being delivered by an external organisation, particularly one such as MYA which had such a wealth of experience in supporting young people's mental health, was that the school development officers may have been more comfortable discussing the topics and dealing with arising mental health issues. Findings from the school staff survey which was implemented by MYA identified a need for further staff training in how to support students with mental health issues. Thus staff may not have felt as confident in delivering MVP training to the mentors themselves. Similarly, the Swedish study reported that teachers were not confident in discussing some of the MVP topics, or were uncomfortable with the theoretical approach and link between gender norms and violence and this impacted on their ability to deliver the programme [22].

In terms of sustainability and future delivery of MVP, interviews with school development officers highlighted a number of potential opportunities to build on and continue to deliver MVP in a manner which was less resource intensive. Specifically how MVP could be sustained long-term in schools where MYA had already delivered mentor and staff training, and supported programme delivery to

mentees. MVP is by nature a train-the-train type model with school development officers being trained by a representative from MVP Scotland, then delivering the training to school staff and mentors, and mentors then delivering the same programme to the mentees. School development officers saw this as an opportunity to create a sustainable approach to programme delivery within schools. Specifically that when mentees entered Key Stage 4 they could undertake the mentor training and deliver the programme to a new cohort of mentees in Key Stage 3. This training could potentially be conducted by school staff members previously trained by the school development officers, however given one of the facilitating factors to implementation was the use of youth workers to train mentors, further research is needed to determine if mentor training delivered by school staff is also effective. It was also suggested that there could be the possibility to have experienced mentors support the training of new mentees, although further piloting and evaluation would be needed to explore if and how this could work. Developing a whole school awareness and ethos around MVP and the bystander approach to violence prevention was also considered crucial by development officers to ensure the success of the programme on a wider school level and increase the likelihood of embedding the programme into the school and making it sustainable. More broadly school development officers were keen to explore how MVP could be expanded to include parents, families and communities. A whole school approach and inclusion of families and communities in school-based intervention programmes is considered best practice in preventing gender-based violence and other forms of youth violence [23].

Impact of the MVP programme on mentors

To date, evidence from the evaluation has shown the programme has successfully achieved a number of its short-term outcomes. Findings from the pre and post training surveys and secondary data from MYA consultations with mentors found that the training had positive impacts on mentors' attitudes and knowledge of violence prevention and the bystander approach, leadership skills and confidence, and peer relationships and school participation.

There was an increase in the proportion of mentors agreeing with each statement related to bystander knowledge and attitudes from the pre to post training survey. Qualitative feedback also suggested the training had a positive impact on mentors' willingness to intervene in potentially problematic situations. School development officers reported that even within the training session, mentors' had begun to challenge unacceptable behaviour just by using the phrase 'MVP'. This was perceived as an easy non-confrontational way to express peer disapproval and begin to change group norms which may be supportive of violence behaviour. Previous evaluations of MVP in US high schools have also shown that participants felt that they were more likely to intervene in a calm and non-violent way after the programme [1]. There was also significant positive increases in mentors' mean level of agreement with many statements on the preventability of violence including statements on self-efficacy in preventing violence (e.g. I myself can make a difference in helping to prevent violence') and use of the bystander approach to violence prevention (e.g. even people who are not involved in a fight can do things that help prevent violence). These findings are consistent with findings from evaluations of the programme in various settings in the US which showed positive changes in participants' attitudes and behaviours towards violence prevention [24, 25, 26]. Whilst the current study piloted mentees' pre and post programme surveys, issues around reliability of the data meant it is not available for inclusion in the current report. However an interesting area for future research is the comparison between mentor and mentee knowledge on bystander approaches and the preventability of violence. Previous evaluations in Scotland found that following MVP participation, a higher proportion of mentors than mentees agreed with a range of statements relating to bystander behaviour and healthy relationships, however no baseline data was available thus it was not possible

to say whether this was because of the MVP programme or whether at baseline a higher proportion of mentors would have agreed with these statements than mentees, thus further research is needed [5]. However, there is evidence to suggest we could expect there to be differences in the impact of the programme on mentors compared to mentees, considering that teaching has been evidenced to be an effective way of learning, and importantly teaching by interacting (e.g. with mentees) is better than teaching by explaining [27].

A key aim of the programme is not just to impart knowledge and skills to mentors so they are confident in challenging gender stereotypes and intervening in problematic situations, but also to empower them to be leaders and role models to their peers and be able to deliver credible messages about bystander behaviour, gender-based violence and violence prevention. As previously discussed it was considered crucial that the students selected as potential mentors were those with good leadership skills prior to taking part, however findings from the training surveys suggested that whilst baseline measures of leadership were high, there were still significant increases in mentors' mean level of agreement on statements about leadership from pre to post training. Qualitative feedback from school staff also suggested that the training and experience of delivering the programme had a positive impact on mentors' confidence and leadership skills; skills which were considered particularly important as many mentors' may not have been the strongest academic students.

Evidence from the mentor surveys also suggested that participation in MVP had positive impacts on mentors' peer relationship and feelings of involvement and connectedness with their school. Qualitative and quantitative findings showed that involvement in MVP helped to develop peer relationships, specifically to make new friends. Furthermore, almost all mentors (96.2%) reported that the training made them feel part of their school, and there was a statistically significant increase in the mean score on the school participation (e.g. I do things at school that make a difference) resilience measure from pre to post training. These findings seem particularly important given that MVP aims to identify students who are 'in-group' members, but not necessarily the high achieving students that come to the attention of staff through their academic achievement or involvement in other extra curriculum activities. Evidence suggests that positive supportive relationships with school staff and peers are a key protective factor against low mental wellbeing in students both with and without family support [28]. Crucially, evidence from the pre training surveys suggests that the average score for mentors on the WEMWBS mental wellbeing measure was lower than the mean score for children the same age in the general population [14]. Thus in addition to being a violence prevention and bystander programme at its core, by identifying students who are less involved in their school to deliver the programme, an unintended impact of MVP could also be the imparting of resilience in the form of school connection and peer relationships to those students who may need it most.

Conclusion

Emerging findings suggest a number of key learnings about the process and impacts of MVP implementation to date in the ten pilot schools. Overall, and despite significant challenges with COVID-19 causing school closures, perceptions of the implementation and the impact of the programme have been overwhelmingly positive. Whilst more rigorous evaluation study design and data from other key participants, such as mentees and school staff (and where relevant a control group), is needed, findings from the current study suggest that implementing the programme in Merseyside schools is feasible and the programme is adaptable to the Merseyside local context. Further, findings from MYA consultations with mentors and pre and post training surveys suggest that they really enjoyed the concept of MVP, the subject content and delivery. Crucially, early findings suggest some important significant changes in mentors' attitudes and knowledge of violence prevention and the bystander

approach. In addition a number of other positive short-term outcomes for mentors were identified including increases in leadership skills, confidence, positive peer relationships and school participation, and measures of resilience factors, including self-esteem, problem solving skills, empathy and goals and aspirations. Overall, findings to date support the continued implementation of MVP in the pilot schools as planned, and provides initial early evidence that MVP could be successfully rolled out to more schools across Merseyside in the next academic year. A quote from one of the mentors provides one of the best reflections on the pilot programme and its impact to date:

“MVP teaches you life skills on mental health and violence. It enlightens you on the effects that cause and prevent violence. For example gender lenses, victim blaming, bystanding, abuse, violence and leadership. MVP stands for Mentors in Violence Prevention and we have learned how to show these skills during our learning. Overall, we are confident in showing people what leads up to violent actions and what changes we can make to stop them.

We are Mentors in Violence Prevention.”

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