

CASE STUDY: VIOLENCE REDUCTION UNIT and HAWKHILL COMMUNITY CENTRE

Jurisdiction: Scotland

Lead organisations: Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) and NHS Clackmannanshire

Partners: Hawkhill Community Centre, Central Scotland Police, Fire and Rescue Service

Funding: Principle funding from VRU, NHS Clackmannanshire additional funding from various sources

Area: Health improvement and crime reduction in an area facing social and economic challenges.

Website: <http://actiononviolence.co.uk/>

Period of activity: Less than 2 years

Resource required: Two part-time officers (from VRU and NHS Clackmannanshire) and a small initial budget for training.

Key features: Community empowerment, success where the state has failed, a level playing field, a holistic approach

Background: The VRU was established by Strathclyde Police in 2005 to reduce violent behaviour in Glasgow. By 2006, its remit had extended to the whole of Scotland. The Unit takes a preventative, public health approach to violence reduction and functions as a national centre of expertise. VRU's work with NHS Clackmannanshire in Hawkhill began in 2011 when a Health Promotion Officer at NHS Clackmannanshire, inspired by similar work elsewhere, approached the VRU for support to develop an asset based approach in Clackmannanshire. Willing strategic partners were found in Central Scotland Police, Clackmannanshire Council, the Fire and Rescue Service and, Hawkhill Community Centre in Alloa. Hawkhill was chosen as the first location. Hawkhill is a relatively self-contained community. Unemployment is high and the community faces a number of challenges related to health, education, poverty and anti-social behaviour. The community centre itself, has faced a number of difficulties over the years and when work began in 2011 – the centre was underused – 'a place where staff worked rather than the centre of the community'.

How does it work? Work began in September, 2011, with a community listening event at the Community Centre – where local people had the opportunity to identify their priorities for the local area and a period of strategic partnership building and training. A community police officer on secondment to the VRU joined the project in August, 2012, and now spends 80% of his time at Hawkhill as a frontline worker. The officer began by building relationships within the community, something that was not always easy. Community members had seen 'a revolving door' of professionals and initiatives over the years, others had had negative experiences with the police or prison and many were sceptical or wary. The officer persisted by knocking on doors and offering to help with shopping. Slowly, he has built trust within

the community and is now beginning to help members to achieve things that are important to them. Achievements include repainting the community centre, upgrading a local footpath, turning waste ground into a community garden, setting up a successful men's health group – 'Man Up' – and most recently, establishing a 'community fun day'. All of these activities have been delivered by the community. External partners such as the Alloa Plant Company have often assisted by providing tools, time or labour, but the relationships are always reciprocal and community members have negotiated support for their own projects.

What's different? Our interviewee at the VRU believes that the key support the community police officer brings to the community is his resilience (his ability to 'bounce back' when a problem is encountered) and his professional connections. He believes that everyone has something positive to offer the community – whether it is enthusiasm, a talent for painting or the skills to support vulnerable members of the community. Reciprocity is central to the relationships being built at Hawkhill.

Impact: Although it's still early days the most obvious change is the liveliness of the community centre and levels of involvement in community activities. Use of the community centre is up 300-400% compared to the start of the project. According to our interviewee, confidence, self belief and pride has increased – community members are now confidently engaging with public services and negotiating with senior public officials. Local people are reporting feeling healthier and happier and even appear physically healthier. Police reports on anti-social behaviour in the local area are also down.

Success factors:

1. A community catalyst (in a paid post) to galvanise community activity, grow community confidence, facilitate connections and provide resilience.
2. Willing community members prepared to take activities forward.
3. Strategic support from public agencies, third sector partners and others. Including local businesses that are willing to listen and work in partnership with the community.

Key challenge:

People, the ups and downs of relationships, both professional and personal.

