



A Safer Scotland For All

The Scottish Violence Reduction Unit:
Five-Year Strategic Plan

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Cover image: Children walking home from school in Drumchapel.
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Director's Welcome



Niven Rennie

Director of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit

In a year when it's been difficult to plan for the next month, week or even day, where do you begin to create a vision for the next five years?

It would be so easy to feel overwhelmed by the challenges ahead. There's been such incalculable loss over the last year; lost loved ones, lost jobs, lost opportunities.

At the SVRU there's a quote we've turned to many times, 'start where you are, use what you have, do what you can'. The original quote I believe came from Arthur Ashe, a man who knew something of overcoming adversity. In the early years of our unit tasked with tackling soaring homicide rates it's a quote we often recited.

So, let's start, and there are good reasons to be optimistic about the journey ahead. We have all just been part of the biggest public health effort in history. Never before has there been such a broad understanding and appreciation for

“ the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organised efforts of society. ”
(Acheson, 1988, WHO)

Those efforts will not end the day the last dose of vaccine is delivered. That is just the beginning of our recovery from COVID-19. An even greater public health effort will be needed to overcome the after-effects. The good news is in Scotland we already have strong foundations. Our country has embedded the knowledge of public health working in every field from health to education and of course justice.

At the SVRU we have been proud card-carrying members of the World Health Organisation's Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA) for more than a decade. We were the first, and for many years remained the only, police members of the VPA. The link between policing and health wasn't a fashionable one back then. However, as the evidence has grown opinions have changed.

In 2019 the Home Office provided funding to set-up 18 VRUs following a public health model across England and Wales. We have shared our hard-earned knowledge of what has, and hasn't, worked for us with many of those units and now we look forward to being able to learn from them as they embark on their own violence prevention journey. They will need time, support and the faith of those in leadership in order to prove their worth. Public health is not a quick fix but, as we've seen demonstrated so clearly over the course of the pandemic, it works.

As we, hopefully, emerge from our homes and head back into the office it will be the public health crisis of widening inequality which will pose one of the biggest challenges in our in-tray. The SVRU have been pleased to take part in [/Together](#) a national conversation about the challenges ahead. Their report highlighted that the young, disabled, minority groups, women and the poor may all be disproportionately affected by the pandemic and its aftermath, increasing existing divisions. They warn, 'Such inequalities have the potential to exacerbate other divisions and to lead to resentments that heighten inter-group conflict'. This is a real risk, but a risk that can be overcome.

There is a genuine desire for transformational change in post-pandemic Scotland. The Social Renewal Advisory Board report **If Not Now When** offers a route towards system change rather than tinkering around the edges of inequality. Foodbanks and baby banks are stark signs that we as a society are failing. Children who face adversity in their early years may suffer the consequences for the rest of their lives, and we as a society will pay the price. A decade on from publication, Christie's words should still be etched into the minds of all those who devote their working lives to public service – **40% of all spending on services is on interventions that could have been avoided by prioritising a preventative approach.** No matter how big the bill for COVID-19, now is not the time to cut back on services which cost so little compared to the invoices our courts, prisons and hospitals could be issuing in a few years' time.

Our five-year strategy starts with a vision for the Scotland we want to help build, a Scotland that is the safest country in the world to live in. We then detail how we will use the knowledge, skills and partnerships we have formed over the last fifteen years to do what we can to help achieve this ... **Start where you are, use what you have, do what you can.**



Executive Summary

Vision: A safer Scotland for all

At the SVRU we believe violence is preventable, not inevitable. Our vision for Scotland is ambitious but achievable:

Together we can make Scotland the safest country to live in the world.

The journey so far:

In 2004/05 Scotland was branded the most violent country in the developed world with 137 victims of homicide. It was against this backdrop the SVRU, with its public health approach to violence, was set up with the remit to '**do something different**'.

Where are we now?

Scotland currently has one of the lowest numbers of recorded homicide cases for a single year since 1976. Between 2010/11 and 2019/20 there's been a 35% reduction in homicides, with Glasgow city accounting for 41% of that fall.



Challenges: The big decreases in non-sexual violence initially seen have now levelled off with the number of homicides in Scotland remaining relatively stable recently. There have been between 59 and 64 homicide cases recorded each year since 2012/13. COVID-19 will undoubtedly have an impact upon violence in Scotland, which will require an evidence-based response.

Opportunities: Scotland is a world-leader in the public health approach to violence with England and Wales recently setting up Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) which we can now benefit from by sharing knowledge of what does and doesn't work. The pandemic has also created a renewed appreciation for public health work.



Glasgow city
accounted for
41%
of that fall



How will the SVRU work to make Scotland safer?

As members of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA) the SVRU remain committed to a public health approach to reducing violence. This approach seeks to improve the health and safety of everyone by addressing the underlying risk factors that increase the chance someone will become either a victim or perpetrator of violence. Based on this model the SVRU will take six actions for a safer Scotland for all:

01

Better use of data

The SVRU is committed to working with partners across Scotland to identify opportunities to share and analyse data with the aim of identifying opportunities to enhance the safety and wellbeing of Scots, while protecting the rights and individual liberties of all.

“ This framework will be the first of its kind. ”

02

Addressing the vulnerabilities

The SVRU is committed to addressing the factors which make people and communities more vulnerable to violence. By using best evidence and innovative approaches we will identify what works and demonstrate how this can be adapted and expanded across Scotland.

03

Place-led approach

The SVRU is committed to creating, testing and evaluating evidence-based, place-led approaches which work with communities to improve life in their area. We will do so by taking a holistic look at the needs of those communities to make their area a safe and healthy place to live, grow and work.

04

Expanding the delivery

The SVRU is committed to increasing the reach of delivery across the country by working with local partners to develop regional centres or hubs that will look to address the specific needs of the local communities.

05

Thought leadership

The SVRU is committed to constantly seeking out innovative evidence-based solutions to violence and sharing our knowledge of what does and doesn't work with all those individuals, organisations and institutions who may benefit from that information. We will seek out new ways of doing this to overcome any restrictions brought by the pandemic.

06

Joining the dots

In partnership with all those involved in tackling violence and its many drivers the SVRU will develop a single strategic framework for Scotland. This framework will be the first of its kind.

Our Vision

“ Violence can be prevented.
This is not an article of faith, but a
statement based on evidence. ”
(World Health report on violence, 2002)



If you start from the point of view that violence is preventable then a future free from violence is possible. At the SVRU our vision is ambitious, but achievable:

Together we can make Scotland the safest country to live in the world.



What would it mean to live in the safest country in the world?

- For children it would mean they are nurtured and resilient, allowed to grow and reach their full potential, protected from early adverse experiences that can blight their future.
- For the elderly it means they can enjoy retirement free from mental, physical, emotional or financial abuse.
- For all people living in Scotland it means the same right to safety – your postcode should not dictate how safe your home, place of work or streets are.
- For new Scots it means the right to build a life in this country free from prejudice.
- For all people living in Scotland it means the home is a refuge and not a place to live in fear.
- For all people living in Scotland it means the freedom to practise their religion in peace.
- For all people living in Scotland it means the right to respectful relationships.

However, this vision is only achievable if we work together. Preventing violence is not just the job of the police. From individuals to communities, business and government at every level, we all have a part to play. There can be no bystanders if we are to succeed in making Scotland the safest country in the world.

The Journey So Far

To see how far we've come we have to look back. In 2005, Scotland was branded the most violent country in the developed world by a United Nations report. That year 137 people were murdered in Scotland, with 41 of those deaths in the city of Glasgow alone. 2005 was also the year the Violence Reduction Unit was set up by the legacy Strathclyde Police. Our remit was to 'do something different' and that's what we set out to do. Heavily influenced by the [World Health Organisation's 2002 World Report on Violence](#), the unit adopted a public health approach to violence and became the first police members of the [WHO Violence Prevention Alliance](#).

Since then the SVRU, following the public health model, has aimed to provide innovative solutions to help reduce violence in the country.

2005:

- The VRU was established by the then Chief Constable of Strathclyde Police Sir Willie Rae, QPM, to address the problem of violence in the Strathclyde area.
- A review of policing tactics and processes was conducted resulting in the DNA testing and finger printing of all knife carriers.

2006:

- A year-long Safer Scotland campaign commenced.
- The VRU becomes a national unit following support from the then Scottish Executive.

2007:

- SVRU hosts the World Health Organisation (WHO) global conference on violence at Tulliallan.
- Then Health Secretary, Nicola Sturgeon, declares that violence is a public health issue.
- Injury surveillance is launched in Lanarkshire.

2010:

- The SVRU bring alcohol-monitoring bracelets to Scotland from America to test.
- Injury surveillance begins in Fife.

2009:

- AVDR (Ask Validate Document Refer), the domestic violence intervention is first rolled out in association with MAV, starting with dentists.
- Parentline start a phone service to support the parents of children involved in gangs.

2008:

- Multi-agency gang intervention programme 'Community Initiative to Reduce Violence' CIRV begins in Glasgow.
- Charity Medics Against Violence is set up with the support of the SVRU.

2011:

- Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme piloted in an Edinburgh school.
- SVRU goes into partnership with the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo to provide employment and mentoring for young people with convictions.
- The 'Community Assets' approach is started in Kilmarnock.

2012:

- St Andrews University begins trials of remote alcohol monitoring technology with students.
- The remote alcohol monitoring technology is approved for court use in the UK.

**2014:**

- The Scottish Government announce the 'Building Safer Communities' approach to reduce the number of victims in Scotland including those affected by violence.
- Brief Violence Intervention is tested in a medical environment.¹
- People with convictions are recruited to support the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.
- 'A Community in Motion' (ACIM) project is launched in four primary schools in the East End of Glasgow.

2013:

- Domestic violence training programme (AVDR) is expanded to vets.
- Police Scotland formed with the merger of eight local services. SVRU works in partnership with the new service as a detached unit.

2015:

- MVP expanded to schools around Scotland following successful trial in Edinburgh and Inverclyde.
- Funding agreed from the Scottish Government for the '**Street&Arrow**' training programme which recruits people with convictions to work in the food industry.
- **The Navigator** (A&E-based violence intervention) programme begins a pilot within the Emergency Department of Glasgow Royal Infirmary in partnership with MAV and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.
- The first ACIM (A Community in Motion) and police day is hosted at Tulliallan Police College.

2016:

- Following a successful pilot at GRI the Navigator programme is expanded to the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh in partnership with NHS Lothian.
- Supporting the roll-out of Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) awareness raising across Scotland.



2017:

- Roll-out of the 'Who are You' training programme across the licensed trade to help reduce sexual assaults.
- In partnership with Ayrshire Police Division begin the process of ACE awareness training all police officers in the Division.

2018:

- The Navigator programme expands to the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital in Glasgow and Crosshouse Hospital in East Ayrshire in partnership with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and NHS Arran and Ayrshire.
- Charity **One Community Scotland** is set up with the support of the SVRU to provide assistance to new Scots from the Horn of Africa community in Glasgow.
- Social enterprise Street & Arrow open new premises with a café in Glasgow Dental Hospital and expand to provide on-site catering for a local building development.
- Following a rise in some forms of violence around other areas in the UK the SVRU hosts visits and provides guidance to police and health colleagues around the country.

**2019:**

- SVRU establish a hub in Edinburgh to extend their reach.
- The unit supports charity Heavy Sound in turning a bus into a mobile community resource. The bus is transformed by inmates at HMP Edinburgh in partnership with the Scottish Prison Service.
- An SVRU hub is set up in Dundee.
- Following guidance from the SVRU the Home Office announces 18 local areas to set up violence reduction units following a public health model in England and Wales.

2020:

- An inspector is recruited to launch an SVRU hub in Ayrshire.
- In response to the increasing stress on frontline services as a result of COVID-19 the Help the Helper programme is developed.
- Pandemic response – supporting vulnerable communities with practical aid and relief effort, the Echo project is launched with 'place-based' work carried out in North Glasgow.
- Work begins in launching custody and community Navigator programmes in Fife and Ayrshire respectively.
- The SVRU support the development of a drugs recovery app in Dundee by the Parish Nurses.
- The SVRU support the Heartstone tolerance programme as it begins work in schools in Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland.



Where Are We Now?

Scotland has made significant progress in reducing violence. Between 2010/11 and 2019/20 there's been a 35% reduction in homicides, with Glasgow city accounting for 41% of that fall. **We currently have one of the lowest numbers of recorded homicide cases for a single year since 1976.**



Glasgow city
accounted for

41%
of that fall



Scotland
has one of lowest numbers
of homicides since 1976

59 -
64

Homicides each
year since 2012

92%

of those accused
of homicide in
2019-20 male

However, the job is far from done. The big decreases in non-sexual violence initially seen have now levelled off with the number of homicides in Scotland remaining relatively stable recently. There have been between 59 and 64 homicide cases recorded each year since 2012. Knives remain an ever-present feature, with a sharp instrument the most common method of killing over the last ten years, however, violent incidents where a weapon was used are less common now than they were a decade ago. Men remain overwhelmingly the main perpetrators of violence with 92% of those accused of homicide in 2019/20 male.

Much of the violent crime in Scotland is concentrated on victims who suffer multiple attacks. These repeat victims are estimated to have experienced 2.7 violent crimes each during 2019/20, but some of the most vulnerable will be subjected to five or more. **These repeat victims of violence (RVVs)** are often young, male and from deprived socioeconomic backgrounds. **The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20** states that whilst this affected one adult in every hundred adults (1.0%) their experiences of violence accounted for almost two-thirds (65%) of violent crime in 2019/20. Violent offending itself can be a key risk factor in becoming a victim of such incidents, due to the victim-offender overlap.

0.1%

of adult
population
victim of



65%

of all violent
crime

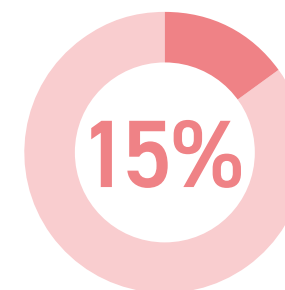


However domestic violence is an important component of RVV. **In incidences of domestic violence women compose the majority of the victims with evidence showing more than 30% of domestic abuse victims suffer more than one victimisation.** In 2019/20 of the 19 female victims of homicide 37% were killed by a partner or ex-partner. Women remain more likely to experience partner abuse (psychological and physical) than men.

The **Scottish Government analysis of violence (2019)** indicates the profile of violence in Scotland has changed over the last decade with less of an

emphasis on 'booze, gangs and blades'. There has been a reduction in younger males becoming involved in violence with violent crime no longer concentrated within a specific age group. There is now no difference in the likelihood of being a victim of violent crime between those aged 16 to 24 and those aged 25 to 44. Perpetrators are also not concentrated in a specific age group, with an increase in the average age of offenders. Alcohol remains a factor in a sizeable proportion of violent incidents. Offenders were believed to be under the influence of alcohol in 44% of violent incidents in 2019/20. While the impact of drugs remains unchanged from 2008/09 with 1 in 3 incidents involving perpetrators believed to be under the influence.

The changes in violence across Scotland have not been even. While victimisation rates have fallen across the majority of the country for those who live in the 15% most deprived neighbourhoods there has been no reduction in the likelihood of experiencing violence since 2008/09. However, getting it right for those that are significantly involved in violence (either as a victim or an offender) will make a significant difference not just to them, but also their families and communities.



most deprived neighbourhoods: between 2008/09 and 2019/20 saw no reduction in likelihood of experiencing violence

Over the last few years around the world we have seen the polarisation of ideas, with the growth of populism and extremist behaviour. Scotland is not immune to this trend. Challenges, both online and in person, in this area are likely to continue and potentially grow fuelled by both domestic and global influences.

The pandemic will undoubtedly have an impact on the profile of violence in Scotland. The periods of lockdown will have seen dramatic reductions in some forms of violence while offering greatly increased opportunities for domestic violence and child abuse. The third sector have reported seeing large increases in cases during lockdown, with Refuge increasing their referrals by 700% in one day. The Centre For Disease Control reported that abusers were using the pandemic to further control their victims, many of whom believed they had no other choice but to remain

in an abusive environment due to the virus. A study by [Refuge and the Co-op Bank](#) indicated that 3% of UK adults saw their economic abuse begin under COVID-19. However, despite the large increase in third sector reporting this did not manifest equally in reporting to the police.

While an immediate response to changes in violence trends is crucial a sustained and evidence-based approach to tackling the issues raised by the pandemic will have to be based on solid, well-collated and analysed data. From figures available so far, we know that during the early stages of the pandemic there was a suppression of interpersonal violence due to decreased opportunities to interact; however, with the gradual release from tight lockdown conditions during the summer months many forms of some forms of violence returned. The cycle of lockdown and release will impact on violence figures on a month-to-month basis, making short-term predictions difficult. However, post-pandemic, there are a number of risk factors including increasing unemployment, post-COVID-19 trauma, increased substance abuse, poor mental and physical health etc. Such factors have the potential to contribute to increasing levels of violence which, if not addressed and supported, may reverse the historic reductions.

Opportunities: Scotland has led the world in our public health approach to violence reduction.

When the then VRU joined the WHO Violence Prevention Alliance we became the first and only police members. In 2007, Scotland hosted the WHO global conference on violence at Tulliallan Police College. It was here that the then health secretary Nicola Sturgeon declared violence to be a public health issue. More than a decade later London's mayor Sadiq Khan set up a VRU modelled on Scotland's approach. In 2019 the Home Office announced 18 local areas in England and Wales were to set up violence reduction units following a public health model. The SVRU has offered extensive support and assistance in the establishment of many such units in the UK, sharing what we have learned in the fifteen years of practising a public health approach to violence reduction in Scotland. We now have an opportunity to learn from these new units as they innovate and evaluate solutions to reduce violence in their area. Sharing knowledge and solutions is key to the public health approach and it's something the SVRU has always benefited from as we searched around the world for programmes that might fit Scotland's needs. A proactive approach to research, data collection and analysis is central to enabling the sharing of evidence and maximising the opportunities of this public health approach. The Scotland of 2021 has a deep and ingrained commitment to improving the lives of all Scots via a public health approach. The purpose of policing enshrined in the Police and Fire Reform

Scotland Act (2012) includes enhancing the wellbeing and safety of communities. The Scottish Government and COSLA have defined [six key public health priorities](#) for organisations and bodies to work together to achieve a healthier, safer and fairer Scotland. While the [National Performance Framework](#) creates a vision of the Scotland we want to create, giving public bodies, and other organisations, a shared set of goals to collaborate towards. Working together across sectors is a crucial element of the public health approach and Scotland has never been in a better position to achieve this.

While the pandemic has created huge damage to our health, wellbeing and our economy, COVID-19 has also generated a renewed and profound appreciation for the importance of public health. Throughout 2020 Scotland had to work as one to survive the pandemic. This same spirit can be harnessed in 2021 and beyond to overcome the epidemics of inequality, poverty, and violence which continue to blight our nation.

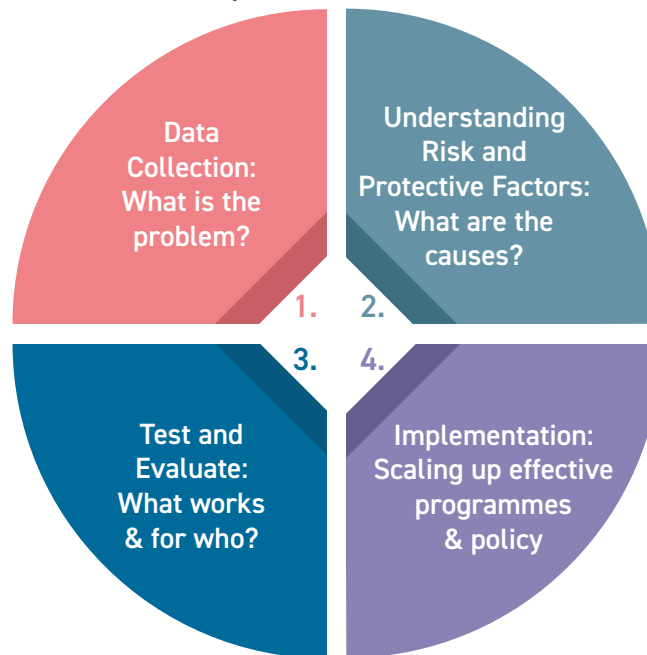
How Will We Work To Make Scotland Safer?

A public health approach to violence

As members of the World Health Organisation's **Violence Prevention Alliance** (VPA), the SVRU remain committed to the public health approach to reducing violence. This approach seeks to improve the health and safety of everyone by addressing the underlying risk factors that increase the chance someone will become either a victim or perpetrator of violence.



The approach consists of four key evidence-led steps:



- 1. What is the problem:** The first step is to gather data to reveal the who, what, why, where and when of the problem. This can be crime data but also information from hospitals, schools and a range of other sources.
- 2. What are the causes:** Look for evidence on the factors that put people at risk of experiencing, or perpetrating, violence as well as the factors that protect them.
- 3. What works and for who?** Using the data gathered the next step is to design, implement and evaluate a violence intervention.
- 4. Scale it up:** If the intervention works then scale it up across the organisation/ community/country while evaluating how well it works and its cost-effectiveness.

Figure 1: Public Health Improvement Model

This four-step model forms the basis of the SVRU approach to helping create a safer Scotland for all over the next five years.



1. Data Collection: The power of bringing together the data that exists across multiple agencies including, health, policing, education, household surveys and housing data etc. can give us extraordinary insights. It is possible that with the improvements in ethical/responsible artificial intelligence (AI) and big data science this will offer new opportunities to reduce violence by identifying where we can best utilise our resources.

2. Understanding risk and protective factors: Using the best evidence we will concentrate our collective efforts in tackling risk factors while supporting protective factors. This is ultimately about reducing a person's vulnerability to being victimised or becoming involved in violence. More evidence and research will always be required in this area so that we can adapt our approach as violence changes.

3. Test and evaluate: Effective evaluation is crucial to discovering what does, and doesn't, work in a public health approach to violence reduction. All key SVRU programmes will have evaluations embedded within them from inception so data can be gathered and rigorously assessed on their effectiveness. This information can then be shared with partners to create a best practice approach to violence reduction in Scotland and beyond.

4. Scaling up: Knowing what works, is just one part of the process. Establishing how to scale a successful approach up, whilst retaining its effectiveness, is crucial to being able to implement wide scale public health solutions to violence. The SVRU will aim to improve the scope of effective programmes through prevention hubs located around the country. When direct scaling-up is not feasible then the SVRU will provide guidance and support to partners to encourage the adoption of effective programmes, policies and practices.

Three levels of intervention:

Public health is all about prevention. Just as it is better to vaccinate against a disease than it is to treat the disease, it is better, and much cheaper, to prevent violence happening in the first place than to react once it has occurred. The three steps of prevention are often referred to as:

- 1. Primary intervention:** to tackle the conditions which allow violence to develop and breed. This first stage is the key stage to long-term prevention.
- 2. Secondary intervention:** early intervention to stop things getting worse if prevention hasn't been possible.
- 3. Tertiary intervention:** responding to violence once it has occurred, treating its effects and rehabilitating the people/areas affected. This is the most expensive option so the earlier the intervention the better for individuals, communities and wider society.

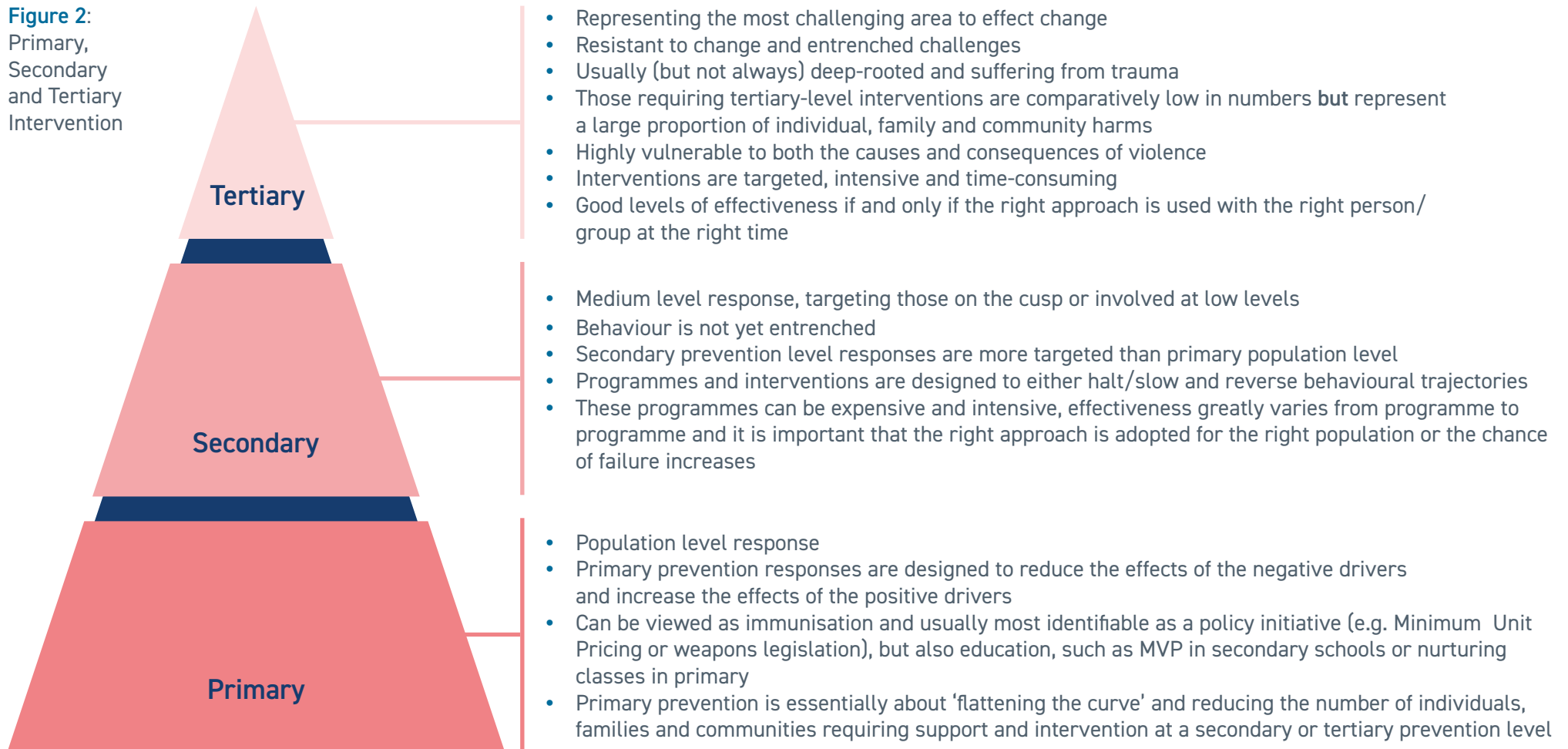
If we are to see a substantial and sustained reduction in violence, then our key focus should be on primary prevention. Success at this level will dramatically reduce both the human and economic cost to the country. However strong secondary and tertiary level prevention is essential to stop the escalation of violence.



“A comprehensive response to violence is one that not only protects and supports victims of violence, but also promotes non-violence, and changes the circumstances and conditions that give rise to violence in the first place.”
(WHO World Report on Violence 2002)

The SVRU will continue to target responses at each level. Effective evidence-led primary level responses which stem the flow of those caught up in the cycle of violence will remain a priority whilst developing robust secondary and tertiary interventions which mitigate the effects of violence upon victims, communities and our country. This can only be achieved through rigorous evaluation of interventions so best practice can be shared with partners across Scotland.

Figure 2:
Primary,
Secondary
and Tertiary
Intervention



Six Actions For A Safer Scotland For All

Action 1: Better use of data

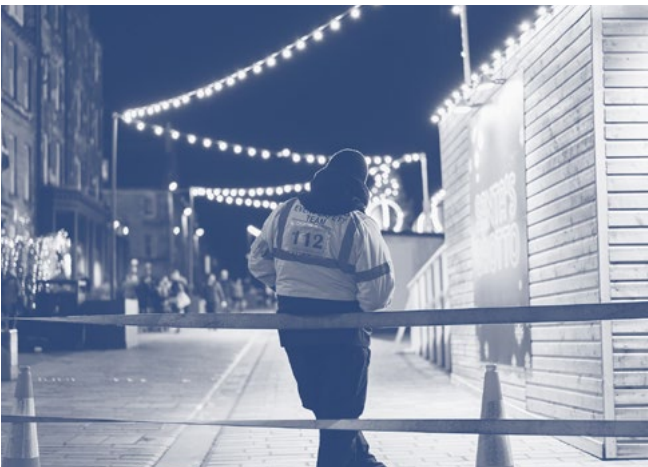
“...the entire digital universe is expected to reach 44 zettabytes by 2020. If this number is correct, it will mean there are 40 times more bytes than there are stars in the observable universe.”

(Jeff Desjardins writing for the World Economic Forum)

In 2021 data is big in every sense of the word and set to get bigger. Last year it was estimated 2.5 quintillion bytes of data was produced by humans every day (Social Media Today). By 2025 that figure is estimated to rise to 463 exabytes (Raconteur). Every day five million tweets are sent (internet live stats), 350 million photographs are uploaded to Facebook (Omni Core Agency) and Google processes more than 3.5 billion search queries (ILS).



Big data is a field that looks for ways to analyse and systematically extract information from data sets that are too large or complex to be dealt with by traditional data-processing methods. Organisations from almost every field are now investing in big data and artificial intelligence as a way of improving their business or work. One field which has enormous potential for the benefits of big data is healthcare, which generates vast amounts of data every day. It is currently being used to track and reduce the spread of COVID-19.



Just as big data offers solutions for other epidemics so too can it offer significant opportunities for tackling the spread of violence. It's argued it has the potential to reduce everything from sexual assaults to climate-aggravated conflict.

In Scotland, the police, health service and the rest of the public sector are huge purveyors of data. By linking and sharing information between services there's the potential for well-analysed data to offer substantial intelligence and insight which can be utilised to enhance the safety and wellbeing of citizens.

However, the utilisation of big data also comes with real risks. Any work in this area must not come at the expense of individual liberties. Robust protections for citizens must be at the heart of all work in this field. There is growing concern around areas such as real-world biases against minorities being replicated within big data and AI. We must remain alert and open about such issues as we explore the opportunities for good.

Traditional forms of data sharing and analysis also remain hugely important to ensuring we create and maintain an accurate picture of violence and its causes in Scotland. Such information enables targeted and effective interventions for violence prevention and reduction. The SVRU will continue to foster relationships with universities and research groups such as the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) and the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (SCCJR). High-quality research and independent evaluations are the bedrock to innovation and evidence-based practice, improving the likelihood of successful outcomes, replicability and sustainability.

Strategic Commitment

Over the next five years the SVRU is committed to working with partners across Scotland to identify opportunities to share and analyse data with the aim of identifying opportunities to enhance the safety and wellbeing of Scots, while protecting the rights and individual liberties of all.

Action 2: Addressing the vulnerabilities

To reduce and ultimately prevent violence we need to understand what causes it. There will likely not be one single cause, but a whole range which has interacted to make someone more likely to become either a victim or a perpetrator of violence. From age and education through to workplaces and broader social and cultural norms. To get a picture of how these forces interact we can use the WHO's ecological model.

This model recognises we cannot look at the problem/vulnerability as a single challenge with one solution, but rather a complex interaction which will require action across multiple levels of the model at the same time. This approach is more likely to ensure a lasting reduction or prevention of violence than any single intervention.

It's important to note that these are only potential risk factors and they won't have the same effect on everyone. Even the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study, which has shown that people with four or more traumatic experiences in childhood are more likely to suffer negative

consequences, cannot predict which individuals will be susceptible and which will be resilient.

The evidence base for the impact of each of these factors is constantly improving. For example, we know that poverty and deprivation are significant risk factors for becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence, as is substance use, age, gender, sexuality, mental health, childhood trauma and whether or not you have been a [victim before](#).

Understanding and addressing the drivers of violence will also have knock-on effects on other areas. For example, high-quality early years enrichment programmes do not just reduce the chance of future violence, they also reduce the susceptibility to addiction, improve mental health and wellbeing. While a reduction in problematic drinking will have benefits in the numbers of violent assaults as well as a reduction in the number health problems.

When tackling emerging areas of concern in Scotland we must continue to look to the root causes and not just the visible symptoms. For example, investigating links between social media and street-based violence should analyse

what's driving the behaviour as well as the tools being utilised. Organised crime will also evolve as markets and technology changes but participation in this area will have deep roots within social conditions and a range of other factors. To tackle these areas we will need to have a detailed knowledge of the geography, drivers and dynamics of violence in Scotland with regular reviews of evidence such as the SCCJR.

The challenges and solutions are inter-connected so it's crucial not to view challenges through a single lens. Solutions must be innovative and holistic, addressing not just the symptoms but also the causes of violence.

Strategic Commitment

Over the next five years the SVRU is committed to addressing the factors which make people and communities more vulnerable to violence. By using best evidence and innovative approaches we will identify what works and demonstrate how this can be adapted and expanded to work across Scotland.

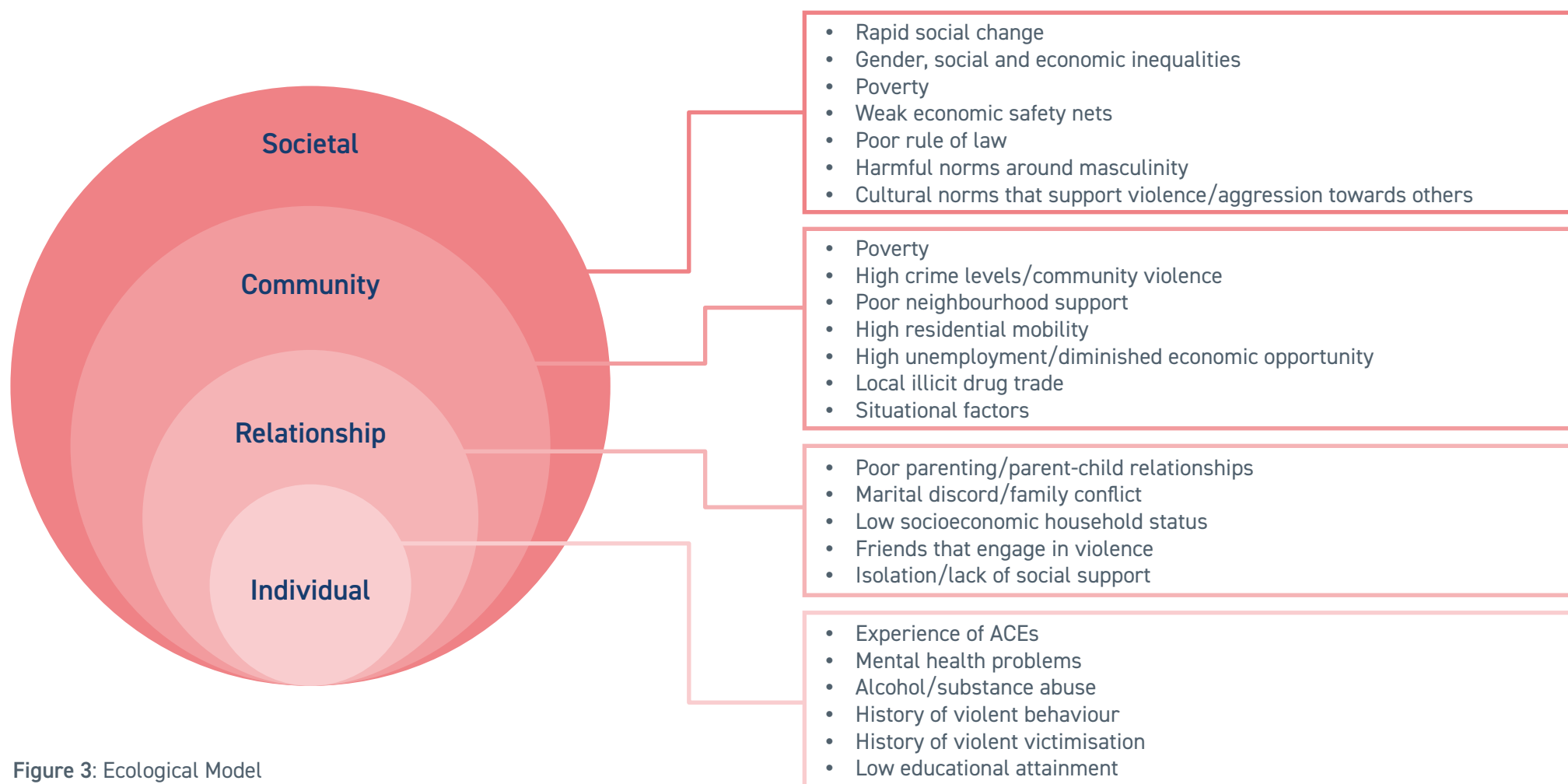


Figure 3: Ecological Model

Action 3: Place-led approach

Where adversity meets opportunity

The places in which we live, and work can impact almost every area of our lives. From our relationships to our safety and success in life. Place is important. So, when we look to solutions we must take in the whole view and not just isolated sections. By considering the whole community – how well its working for everyone and what it needs to work better – we have the best chance of improving the lives of all those who live in that area.

The Scottish Government and COSLA have agreed to adopt the **Place Principle** to help overcome the boundaries between organisations and sectors which may prevent communities receiving the support they need to improve life in their area. This supports the **National Performance Framework's** collective purpose for Scotland.

There are a number of reasons which may be given for adopting a place-based approach. For the SVRU's work we believe a civic and a joined up rational applies.

Civic Rational – the need for higher-quality, more responsive services and for communities to deliver more services for themselves.

Joined-Up Rational – the need for improved coordination and more integrated services.

It's critical any solutions are developed working together with communities rather than being imposed top-down. **The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015** puts people and communities at the centre of decision making and service design for their area. Only by working with our communities can we help deliver better outcomes for them.

The SVRU have a long history of working hand-in-hand with communities, helping to identify the assets within those areas who can lead the transformation. Over the next five years we will test a range of place-based interventions including community assets and

the democratisation of communities. We will LISTEN to communities to develop new ways of working to improve the outcomes of some of the most vulnerable individuals and families.

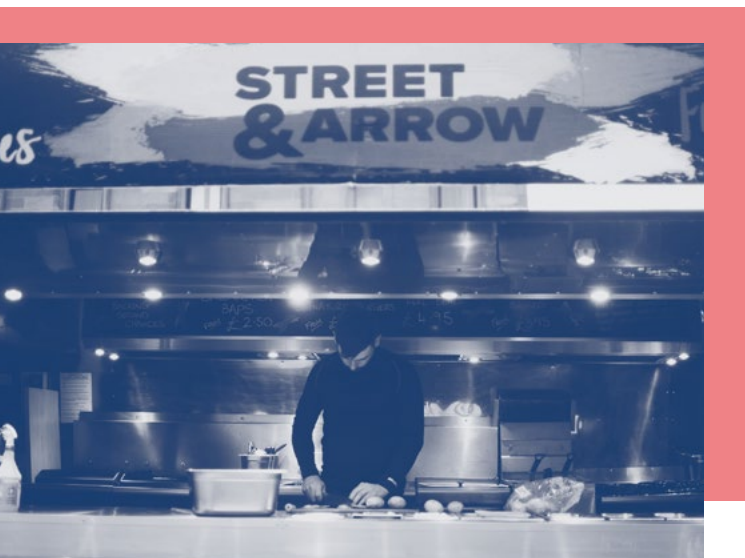
The Glasgow North and Wallacetown area in South Ayrshire represent significant opportunities to work with agents of changes in both services and communities to identify new ways of working and establish effective networks. The challenges that exist in both areas were not created yesterday and will not be fixed tomorrow. However, by working with the local communities we believe they can see lasting reductions in violence.

Strategic Commitment

The SVRU is committed to creating, testing and evaluating evidence-based, place-led approaches which work with communities to improve life in their area. We will do so by taking a holistic look at the needs of those communities to make their area a safe and healthy place to live, grow and work.

Action 4: Expanding the delivery

The VRU was created by the legacy Strathclyde Police in 2004/05 to tackle Glasgow's rising homicide rates. That year there had been 41 deaths in Glasgow alone. The need in the city to find a different approach to reduce violence was urgent. However, in 2006 the VRU was made into a national unit by the then Scottish Executive with a remit covering the whole of the country.



While we have retained our base in Glasgow much of what we have done has had a national reach. For example, in our early years we pushed for tougher laws around knife carrying. Many of our projects have also extended across the country. Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP), delivered in partnership with Education Scotland, is now Scotland's largest anti-violence schools programme operating in 130 secondary schools across 25 local authority areas from Shetland to the Scottish Borders.

However, our base until recently remained very much in Glasgow. We believe there is now a need to extend our physical presence to areas around Scotland. Our experience, and the evidence, shows us that strong in-person relationships with communities, local service providers and the organisations which support those areas are crucial to creating effective and bespoke solutions for an area. The issues which affect inner-city Glasgow won't necessarily be the same issues affecting Ayrshire or Angus. To help us create violence reduction solutions tailored to each area we have already

established SVRU hubs in Edinburgh, Dundee and recently Ayrshire. The growth has been organic and based around the need within that area and our ability to provide violence reduction support for that location.

Each hub has at its heart a highly experienced police officer with an extensive knowledge of the issues that area faces, as well as strong relationships with the local community and partners. These hubs receive support in their work from the team of researchers, trainers, police officers, technology, administration and communications staff based within the central office. Following the success of the three existing hubs the SVRU are now keen to extend the reach of the unit in order to better fulfil our national remit. We therefore plan to add further hubs in the Highlands and possibly the North East of the country, where we believe we can assist communities in the area with violence prevention and reduction work. If a need arises for further hubs, resources allowing, the SVRU will look to expand further.

Working closely with organisations such as Community Planning Partnerships, these hubs will allow bespoke community-led strategies to be implemented, whilst also enabling the roll-out of successfully evaluated programmes which have been developed in other areas of the country by the unit, for example the community and custody 'Navigator' initiatives.

Strategic Commitment

Over the next five years the SVRU is committed to increasing the reach of delivery across the country by working with local partners to develop regional centres or hubs that will look to address the specific needs of the local communities.

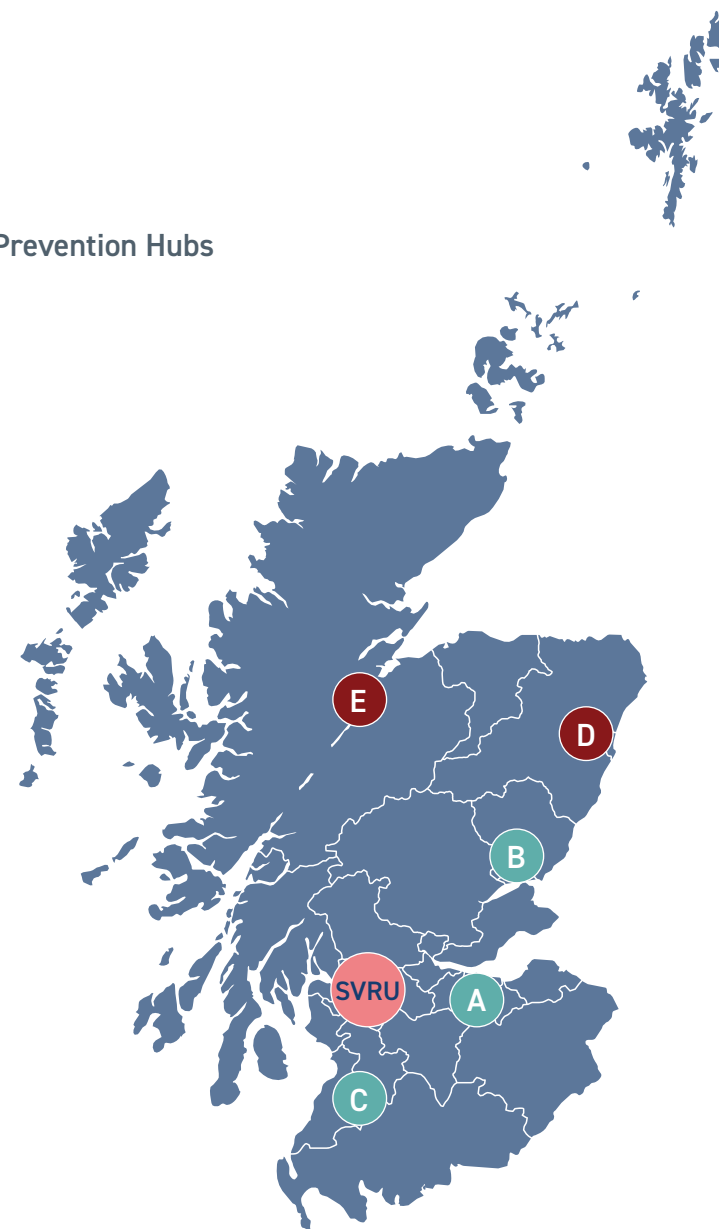
Proposed SVRU Innovation and Prevention Hubs

Existing locations

- A Edinburgh
- B Dundee
- C Ayrshire

Proposed locations

- D North East
- E Highlands
- SVRU Glasgow SVRU HQ



Action 5: Thought leadership

The SVRU was set up with the instruction to 'think differently' and that is what we've sought to do throughout the last fifteen years. We have tried to look at violence from a different perspective, to see not just the symptoms but the causes too. We don't just want to take the knife from someone's hand; we want to stop them picking it up in the first place.

To do this we've looked around the world for knowledge and inspiration. We've sought out the evidence of what does and doesn't work. Adapting those initiatives that look most promising then testing and rolling out those that fit Scotland's needs best. In this process we've benefited enormously from a global community of individuals and institutions who have generously shared their knowledge and experience. In turn we have tried to pay this forward by sharing our own learning where it is requested or needed in Scotland and beyond.

Not all organisations have the time, resources or remit to source, test and evaluate different approaches. So, where the SVRU has found

evidence-based solutions we will continue to share those approaches around the country with those whose practice may benefit from that knowledge. Where we can we will do this in person, however, with the COVID-19 epidemic still limiting such contact we will utilise online resources as effectively as possible. In doing so we can dramatically increase the reach and capacity of the unit.

Whether it be data, tool kits, online conferences, virtual services or social media we will look at new technology-driven ways to share knowledge and offer support across the country.

We will also ceaselessly search out new solutions and learn from others. The increasing support for the public health approach to violence around the rest of the UK offers us the opportunity to learn from their experiences as they test solutions for their own areas.

Often the answers however will lie closer to home, with communities best placed to understand the issues affecting them and the changes that will make things better. We will

listen to our communities we will learn from them and we will work with them to bring change.

Like any virus, violence is constantly mutating and evolving, and we must keep pace with its developments if we are to stand a chance of restraining and treating it effectively.

Strategic Commitment

The SVRU is committed to constantly seeking out innovative evidence-based solutions to violence and sharing our knowledge of what does and does not work with all those individuals, organisations and institutions who may benefit from that information. We will listen and work with communities to improve lives. We will seek out new ways of doing this to overcome any restrictions brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and to increase our reach and capacity to help.

Action 6: Joining the dots

If there is one lesson we can take from COVID-19 it is that we must work together. Even if our part in overcoming the pandemic was simply to 'stay at home and stop the spread', it was still an important role and crucial to success. Just as ending the pandemic wasn't just the job of the NHS, overcoming violence is not just the job of the police. Every profession, and every person, has a part to play. We know how successful strong partnerships can be so now is the time to forge alliances which can overcome violence and the devastation it causes.

The underlying factors which allow violence to gain its foothold in society are in many cases the same factors that affect a number of the complex social challenges we face today. It is a web of interconnected issues where nothing exists in isolation. From violence, poverty, homelessness and drug addiction to poor mental and physical health, it is very difficult to effectively address any of these issues by itself.

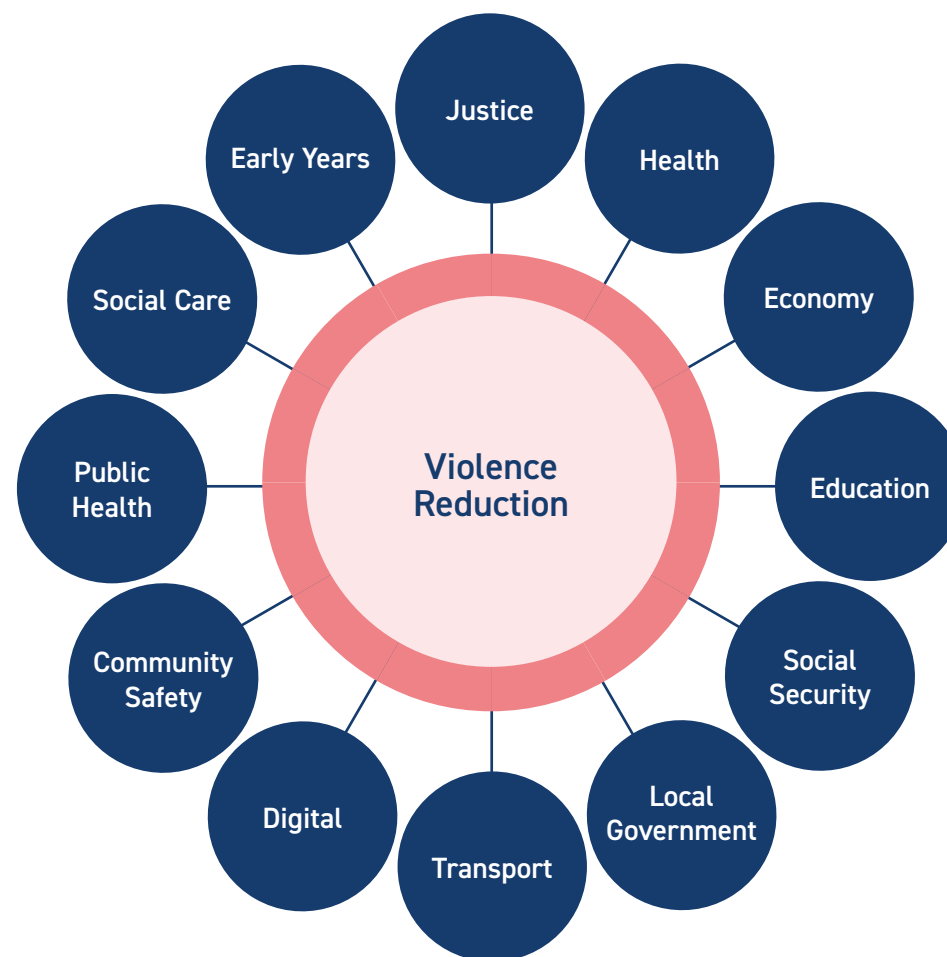


Figure 4: Joining the dots

Both the challenges and the solutions are interconnected which means delivery, policy and strategy must also be aligned. While policy links into areas such as community justice, policing, prisons and community safety are obvious, there are also links to education (at all levels), employability, health (physical, mental and public), human rights, housing and early years etc. The breadth of what is required can seem overwhelming.

This is not about over-complicating the problem, quite the opposite: it is about simplifying to understand what we all do well and how we can all contribute together rather than create new structures. However, there may also be a need to consider realignment and reprioritisation.

Together we can and will rebuild a better version of our country. It is with optimism we face the future knowing that a safer and healthier Scotland is possible.

There are a wide range of policies that can impact violence reduction.



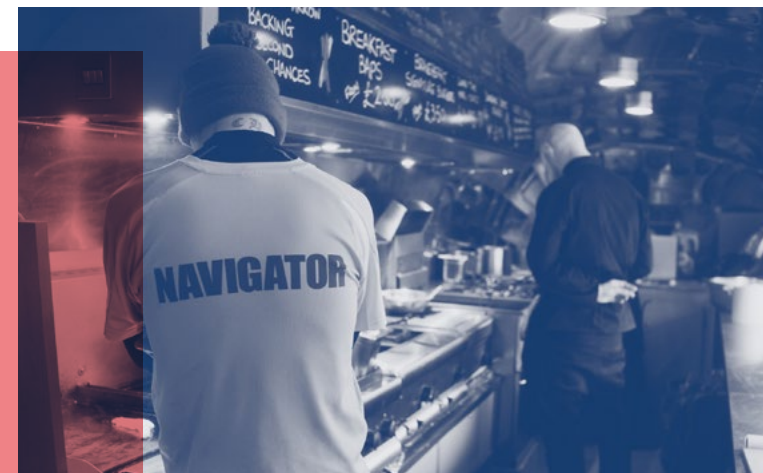
Strategic Commitment

Over the next five years the SVRU in partnership with the legion of people involved in tackling violence and its many drivers will develop a single strategic framework for Scotland. This framework will be the first of its kind and we (the multi-agency working group) will develop the necessary tools and working groups to enable the process.

Examples of Activity

Over the next five years the SVRU will continue to push boundaries and test out new ways of working which challenge the status quo. We will look to help create opportunities for change which will make a sustainable difference to the safety, health and wellbeing of the people of Scotland. There are no simple solutions for complex challenges, so in everything we do we will deploy the best available evidence to design, test and implement violence reduction and prevention initiatives. Provided here are some examples of the work we plan to carry out.

Partnership, collaboration and co-production are founding principles of the SVRU. In delivering our ambition to make Scotland free from violence and the harm that it causes, we will work with communities and services across the country, accessing networks, skills and resources that enable us to reach our goal and make Scotland the safest country to live in the world.



Action Area	Delivery	Description	What success looks like
Data & Evidence	Injury Surveillance (IS).	To work with Public Health Scotland to improve the availability and reliability of IS data, to share with Police Scotland, to help identify violent hot spot areas.	Standardised reporting and sharing of IS data across all emergency medicine sites in Scotland.
Data & Evidence	Partnership Analysis Frameworks.	To work with partners including Police Scotland, the Scottish Community Safety Network, the NHS and Scottish Government etc. to develop new reporting and analysis frameworks for violence.	Sharing knowledge and best practice across and between disciplines.
Data & Evidence	Advocate and support for 'blue light' data sharing.	To work with the 'blue light' services to advocate for the sharing of information as best practice. Enabling more effective support for victims and the development of more holistic prevention strategies.	Data warehousing and nominal information sharing across the services.
Data & Evidence	Develop relationships with social media providers and technology leaders.	To create feedback channels from social media and technology providers to enable the early identification of trends and threats.	Working relationships and shared projects with providers.
Data & Evidence	Develop research partnerships with universities and other centres of excellence.	Through research partnerships we will be able to deliver greater understanding of both the causes and consequences of violence.	A growing body of published research into the causes, consequences and effective prevention/reduction of violence.
Vulnerability	Expansion of the Navigator-style model.	Extending the trauma informed person-centred approach 'Navigator' to community and custody settings where there's an opportunity for 'a reachable moment' to impact behaviour and assist positive change.	<p>A network of targeted 'Navigator' teams established in communities identified as most in need.</p> <p>To increase the reach and development of an extended 'model of delivery' for use in different settings by partner organisations. Guidance and support provided by the SVRU.</p>
Vulnerability	Alcohol interventions.	Post-COVID-19, to review the impact and role that alcohol has on violence and develop new strategies for this new landscape. Working with partners in this area develop evidence-based interventions within the post COVID-19 environment.	Develop and deliver new strategies to tackle alcohol and violence and evaluation of the impact of interventions in addressing the effects of alcohol on violent behaviour.

Action Area	Delivery	Description	What success looks like
Vulnerability	Mentoring and support.	<p>Work with partners in the third and public sector to develop and extend evidence-based mentoring approaches across Scotland.</p> <p>Developing the lived experience base and encouraging training and development within the sector.</p>	<p>Support increased lived experience mentors trained and supporting people within communities where levels of violence are high.</p> <p>Through advocacy, training, best practice and evaluation of existing approaches and new developments in the field.</p>
Vulnerability	Development of Trauma Programming.	<p>Test and roll out trauma-informed programming beyond awareness raising, to create practice that is trauma-focused.</p> <p>Building on the initial work carried out previously with Police Scotland Ayrshire Division and the ACEs movement in Scotland the SVRU will look to develop operational toolkits to enhance practical application in support of any wider application of trauma training by NES.</p>	Successful evaluation of the programme and a wider-scale delivery through policing and other partner organisations.
Vulnerability	Reassessing and redeveloping knife or other weapon interventions.	<p>Police Scotland and the SVRU to review violent crime including weapons possession to understand the rise in recorded possession statistics.</p> <p>Findings from this report will enable targeted actions to reduce the impact of weapons in society.</p>	<p>Delivery of analysis report and findings to generate action plans.</p> <p>Improved understanding and reductions in harm caused.</p>
Vulnerability	Addressing Hate Crime.	To monitor and identify new risks and opportunities to effect change and reduce all forms of Hate Crime.	Evaluate the outcomes of the specific interventions.
Vulnerability	To identify primary and secondary prevention responses in schools to prevent a growth in youth violence.	<p>To work with appropriate specialist organisations to develop targeted prevention activity for example, schools-based education programming, attitudinal change, restorative practices and advocacy work.</p> <p>Assess the viability and expand if appropriate the MVP programme into primary schools.</p>	Evaluated programmes being delivered across the school estate in partnership with organisations such as Education Scotland.

Action Area	Delivery	Description	What success looks like
Vulnerability	To continue to develop innovative responses to the drivers of violence.	The development and testing of innovative responses to both the causes and the consequences of violence.	Evaluated programmes and the progression towards mainstreaming successful interventions.
Place-based	Establish new areas to trial and evaluate innovative place-based solutions.	To identify and nurture a community in Scotland to bring fresh approaches and tackle the complexity of the challenge holistically.	The delivery of multiple aligned approaches, whilst working in collaboration with the local communities and local stakeholders.
Place-based	Integrate evidence-based approaches into the area.	To establish what the drivers of change are and implement the best evidence-based practice known.	Evaluation and testing out of evidence-based interventions designed around local need.
Place-based	Establish partnerships for long-term delivery and sustainability.	To develop the networks and the commitment to delivery to ensure continuation of the approach in the long-term.	The development of sustainable formal and informal collaborative partnership groups where the SVRUs role is secondary to that of those living and working in the local area.
Place-based	Catalogue activity/programmes and approaches.	Create guides and improve the understanding of the approaches taken. Identifying how best to implement similar approaches elsewhere. Specifically determining the conditions required and the actions required.	Produce documentation to support the approach so that lessons learned can be shared.
Place-based	Cascade learning.	Implement the learning elsewhere in other approaches and or geographic locations.	Evidence of the approaches used in one area being either adopted in another area or the principles and learning generated incorporated within wider strategies and/or policies.
Place-based	Evidence activity and outcomes.	Create reports and evaluations on individual and the collective programme of work.	Published reports made publicly available.
Expansion	Extending Tayside SVRU Hub.	Proving the need and impact of developing a local violence reduction programme of work in Tayside and the surrounding area.	Role continues beyond current agreement with Police Scotland.
Expansion	Develop the East SVRU Hub to include local and national strategic partners.	To bring together partners to address locally relevant violence reduction challenges.	Programme of work established with agreed targets.

Action Area	Delivery	Description	What success looks like
Expansion	Expand the Ayrshire Hub to cover the whole region including Dumfries.	Develop the remit of the Ayrshire SVRU hub beyond the initial area and expand across the region.	SVRU campaigning work to be evaluated.
Expansion	Establish further regional hubs.	To expand the delivery and provide more localised support the SVRU will work with partners to develop at least two further hubs potentially in the North East and Highlands.	The development, make-up and remit of the new regional hubs will be dependent on the needs of the local communities. Early stage success would be the establishment of new agreed partnerships.
Expansion	To develop national strategic partners with third sector organisations.	Establish a network of specialist partners that will support violence prevention activity at both a national and local level.	Information-sharing protocols partnership agreements with joint delivery of projects.
Expansion	To encourage sustainability of best practice.	Embedding best practice and evidence-led activity into mainstream operational practices and funding.	Feedback from services and organisations who have adopted approaches, principles or operational activity.
Leadership	Develop prevention toolkit – online.	Production of a freely available best practice resource for services and communities to use in the prevention of violence at all levels. This evidence-based toolkit will seek to ensure that the most effective activity is promoted across the country.	Launch of the toolkit and continual updating of the product on the SVRU website. Evidence of the toolkit being used to develop prevention responses elsewhere.
Leadership	Support academic research into the drivers of violence.	Develop new relationships and new externally funded research with partners.	Increase the published evidence base supporting violence reduction work.
Leadership	Provide advocacy for evidence-based change.	Working with change and decision makers to advocate for change in areas where the evidence suggests a difference could be made.	SVRU campaigning work to be tracked.
Leadership	Develop training programmes on evidence-based solutions.	Developing on and offline training to support the best evidence for violence prevention.	Successful delivery of training programmes to defined targeted groups.
Leadership	Work with service providers including policing to develop public health responses.	Provide strategic level guidance and support to organisations and working groups.	Increased number of organisations demonstrating the adoption of public health methodology.
Leadership	Continue to 'think differently' and be the voice of change.	Speaking uncomfortable evidence-led truths: challenging the status quo on thinking.	Adoption of new principles and thinking by others.

Action Area	Delivery	Description	What success looks like
Leadership	Provide technical support.	Supporting the delivery of innovative violence reduction projects by other services.	Adoption of the violence reduction/prevention evidence base in the deployment of programmes and activity.
Leadership	The development of an online portal to provide signposting and support for the victims of violence.	<p>The creation of an online support service which will offer targeted localised support for repeat victims of violence.</p> <p>The service will help victims find the right support and services from existing providers to help them in the initial period after an attack.</p>	Evaluated to assess the levels of engagement and if there is a decrease in re-victimisation among those who have engaged with the service.
Leadership	Effect change on the narrative around violence.	Use different communication methods to effect change on the different narratives that impact on our beliefs around violence and its drivers.	Assessing and reporting on the impact of the different communications activity.
Joining the dots	<p>Develop a multi-agency strategy to address the drivers of violence.</p> <p>The development of an online portal to provide signposting and support for the victims of violence.</p>	There have been a number of violence strategies produced in Scotland but these have usually only been linked to a handful of organisations producing them independently. By working with key partners across a range of services and specialisms we will collaboratively develop a multi-agency strategy for tackling violence in Scotland.	The production of a fully agreed co-produced multi-sectorial strategy.
Joining the dots	Develop action plans to support the multi-agency strategy. Effect change on the narrative around violence.	Identify key deliverables and seek to gain commitment from the business owners on the delivery of these actions. Use various communication methods to help change the narrative around violence and its causes.	Action log tracker and measure any impact both qualitatively and quantitatively. Assessing and reporting on the impact of the different communications activity.

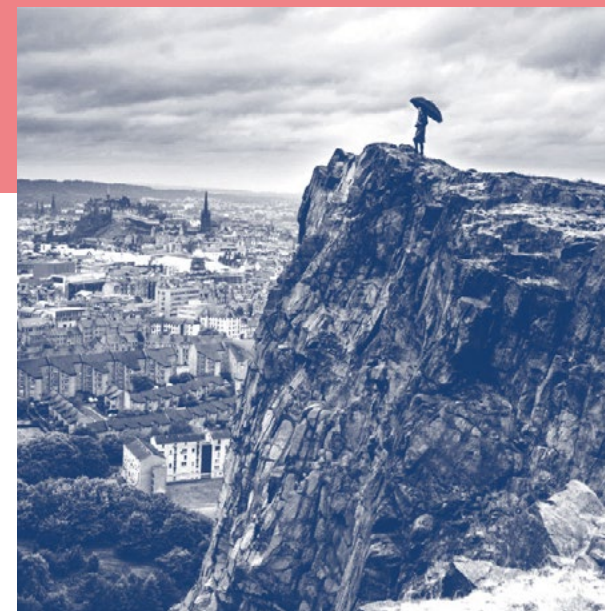
Acknowledgments

The SVRU is part of Police Scotland and funded by the Scottish Government.

Throughout the document we draw on the latest available statistics at the time of publication from the Scottish Government's Justice Analytical Service. The public health model utilised by the SVRU is as defined by the World Health Organisation's Violence Prevention Alliance. The social ecological model cited is derived from the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner.

The SVRU would like to thank all our partners who have supported, guided and worked with us since our establishment in 2005, sharing the vision that violence is preventable, not inevitable.

For further information about the SVRU go to www.svru.co.uk



“ It would seem that, quite possibly, the ultimate measure of health in any community might well reside in our ability to stand in awe at what folks have to carry rather than in judgement at how they carry it. ”

(Father Gregory Boyle,
founder of Homeboy Industries)



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