

*"They can completely change a life"*

# **An Evaluation of the Custody Navigators Programme, Merseyside**



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World Health Organization Collaborating Centre  
for Violence Prevention

# An Evaluation of the Custody Navigators Programme, Merseyside

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**April 2026**

## About this report

Merseyside is one of several areas allocated funding since 2019 by the UK government to establish a Violence Reduction Unit. To inform the continued development of the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP) since November 2019, Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), have been commissioned to evaluate the MVRP as a whole (Quigg et al, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023), and selected work programmes. In addition, since 2022/23, LJMU have been commissioned to implement additional research to fill gaps in local knowledge. This report forms one of a suite of outputs from the 2025/26 research and evaluation work programme and specifically presents an evaluation of the Custody Navigators programme. Additional reports for 2025/26 explore:

- Young Futures Prevention Panels (Harris et al, 2026).
- Operation Inclusion (Wilson et al, 2026).
- Fire Champions (Smith et al, 2026).
- Be the Change (Smith et al, 2026).
- Neurodiversity Toolkit (McCoy et al, 2026).
- Children and young people's survey findings (Butler et al, 2026; Quigg et al, 2026).
- Whole system evaluation (Harris et al, 2026)

Outputs are available on the MVRP website: [www.merseysidevrp.com](http://www.merseysidevrp.com) or via Zara Quigg [z.a.quigg@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:z.a.quigg@ljmu.ac.uk).

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- All study participants who took the time to take part in interviews and provided their views on the implementation, delivery, and impacts of the programme.
- Special thanks to the young people and parents who took the time to speak to us to provide their views.

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP) along with youth justice and police partners identified a gap in provision for a Child First and trauma-informed approach to children in police custody. In 2025, MVRP funded a custody navigator programme based within Copy Lane Custody Suite. This employs two full-time custody navigators through Sefton Council who work with children aged 10-17 years old. The primary aim of the programme is to divert children away from the criminal justice system, specifically violent crime. The role of the Navigators is first and foremost; to provide them with support in a time of crisis, wherein the Navigator will identify their needs and develop a plan of support for the child. Other ongoing support includes providing information and signposting to appropriate services such as education, training, drugs and alcohol services, employment, accommodation, and financial advice. Any child aged 10-17 years, from any local authority, who is arrested and taken to Copy Lane is eligible for custody navigator support. Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) was commissioned to conduct a feasibility and pilot evaluation of the Custody Navigator Programme at Copy Lane Custody Suite.

## Evaluation Methods

	<p><b>Review of Programme Documentation</b></p> <p>Documentation and materials produced throughout the design and implementation of the custody navigator programme were reviewed and collated. This documentation was at a programme level and did not contain any identifiable data. Relevant information collected through programme documentation review is used throughout the findings section to complement data collected by other methods. This information was collated using the TIDierPHP (Template for Intervention Description and Replication for population health programmes) reporting guideline (Appendix 1).</p>
	<p><b>Review and Analysis of Programme Monitoring Data</b></p> <p>Custody navigator programme monitoring data is routinely collected by the navigators and includes information on demographics, risk factors and needs, offending, and custody outcomes. Programme monitoring data covered the period between 8th April 2025 and 5th March 2026. The data was reviewed to understand the programme’s reach, uptake by children offered the programme, custody outcomes, length of engagement, and activities.</p>
	<p><b>Qualitative interviews</b></p> <p>Interviews were carried out with stakeholders (<math>n=12</math>) from police, MVRP, youth justice, and Mersey Care, children who were supported by custody navigators (<math>n=3</math>), and parents of children who were supported by custody navigators (<math>n=2</math>), to explore how the custody navigator programme at Copy Lane works, any barriers and facilitators to implementation, and emerging outcomes and impacts of the programme for children.</p>
	<p><b>Child Case Studies</b></p> <p>Case studies (<math>n=5</math>) were gathered through face-to-face, interview-style discussions with custody navigators to gather information on children’s journey from custody to the subsequent support and tailored provision they received.</p>

## Findings

### Programme dose and reach

- There were 132 children eligible for custody navigator support between 8th April 2025 and 5th March 2026.
- 102 (84%) of the children agreed to be seen by the navigators while in custody.
- Half (62) of these children consented to follow up support with the navigators in the community.
- Of the children who consented to follow up support in the community, two thirds (65%) engaged with the support that was offered.

### Demographics

- The majority of children offered custody navigator support were male (87%), White British (93%), and aged 15-17 years (76%).
- Six in ten (59%) of children were known to any services, 25% were recorded as a looked after child, and 52% had some form of social care involvement.
- Nearly two-thirds (63%) were recorded as having a disability or health need, and 53% had some form of neurodivergence (mostly commonly recorded was st commonly recorded type of disability was ADHD).
- Over a third (37%) of children were not in any form of education, training, or employment.
- Alleged offences recorded included physical violence (22.7%; n=30), assault causing actual bodily harm (17.4%; n=23), theft or robbery offences (25.0%; n=33).
- Where data was available for children (28.0%; n=37), 51% were first time attendants in the custody suite, while 49% had previous custody attendances.
- Arrests for a physically violent offence were significantly higher among females (76.5%; n=13), children known to services (53.8%; n=42), children who were looked after (68.8%; n=22) and children who had children's social care involvement (56.5%; n=39).

### Programme implementation and delivery

- Custody navigators kept fidelity to the proposed model in terms of engaging children (n=36) and diverting them away from the criminal justice system for the period of time they were engaged with them. Navigators also kept to fidelity by supporting children in custody in a time of crisis and provided signposting to relevant services such as care homes, schools, and colleges.
- Originally, it was intended that there would be 2-3 full-time custody navigators in post, however this was never reached. Between April 2025 and end July 2025 there was only one navigator in post until a second navigator was employed in August 2025.
- A minor adaption has been made to the hours navigators work. The intended hours of work were between 9am-5pm Monday to Friday, but they now work alternate shifts - one navigator works 9am-5pm Monday to Friday and the other navigator works 7am-7pm, and they switch shifts each alternate week, meaning that there is a navigator present between 9am-7pm each weekday.
- Facilitating factors for programme implementation and delivery included: acceptability of the programme by Merseyside Police, both in senior roles and those within the custody suite; the multi-agency partnership working within the custody suite between youth justice, police, liaison and diversion (L&D), and the custody navigators; and the dedicated space in the breakout room and adaptations to the custody cells also supported programme delivery.
- Barriers to programme implementation and delivery included: initial onboarding the custody navigators to local authority and police systems (e.g. Liquid Logic, NICHE) was challenging (but

has now somewhat been overcome i.e. they can now access NICHE but only have access to Liquid Logic in Sefton); custody navigators see children from different local authorities and each one has different policies and procedures in place which makes it challenging for navigators who may need support or to contact someone in these local authorities so they can appropriately signpost a child. This is still something that needs to be resolved.

## Experiences and emerging outcomes

- Overall, the evaluation shows acceptability and positive experiences of the programme by children, parents, and stakeholders. Key positive experiences related to the navigators ability to build trusting, supportive relationships with children and their families. The qualitative findings demonstrate some emerging evidence of positive outcomes including navigators ability to build trusting, supportive relationships with children and families; navigators adeptness at building strong working relationships with other stakeholders involved and with other supporting services and practitioners; and parents of children who had received navigator support in custody reported observing positive changes and outcomes in their child following the intervention such as returning to education and engagement in social activities.
- One less positive view from some parents was the lack of a website dedicated to the custody navigators, outlining their specific role and the offer of support.
- Children felt that the navigator programme has supported them particularly during the time when they are under bail conditions following their arrest and this has kept many of them from being arrested again and for some, back in education and a supportive routine.
- Currently, there is no data that is recorded by the navigators that enables evaluation of the impact of their work undertaken. Further, due to capacity issues within the Navigator Team, it was not feasible to collect secondary outcome data using the Rosenberg 10-item self-esteem scale to gain insight into how children feel about themselves through self-worth, social interactions, and motivations.
- The evaluation demonstrates that the navigators are working towards achieving its intended outcome to divert children away from the criminal justice system, specifically, violent crime.
- The use of language around 'children' (replacing the word juvenile) first brought to light by the MVRP and now being put into practice by custody navigators is beginning to show system-level cultural change within the police custody environment. Further to this, Merseyside Police are offered trauma-informed training by MVRP which could also support this change.

## Recommendations

### Service-Level

- A standard outcomes framework and monitoring data tracker sheet should be developed before rolling out to other custody suite. This will support future evaluations.
- There should be three navigators employed by Sefton Council and in post at Copy Lane custody suite to support the intervention to run to fidelity of the original model.
- Currently, navigators work alternate shifts - one navigator works 9am-5pm Monday to Friday and the other navigator works 7am-7pm, and they switch shifts each alternate week meaning that there is a navigator present between 9am-7pm each weekday. However, navigators could work evenings and weekends to increase engagement with all children within the custody suite whilst in a time of crisis. This will likely be feasible if a third navigator is employed. This will also likely improve the dose and reach of the programme, which could be measured at a future evaluation.
- Navigators can use police systems to track any children who were arrested in the evening or at weekends when they are not working and follow-up with them to offer support within the

community. However, this is inconsistent and dependent upon time and availability of navigators. Going forward this could be strengthened and embedded into their weekly work schedule.

- Custody navigators should be present in all suites in Merseyside to ensure there are no missed opportunities for children who have been arrested. This model could be replicated across all suites, and the current navigators could lead this training and development.
- Long-term, consideration should be given to a child-only custody suite for Merseyside. This would be a bespoke suite which would include a team of navigators, and practitioners including mental health, substance use, youth justice and police.
- The navigator steering group need to consider ways in which to overcome the issues with local authorities having different procedures and policies in place for children who are being supported by navigators. This could be in the form of a workshop to bring together stakeholders from all agencies involved to discuss current procedures and guidelines, barriers for custody navigators and children they are supporting, suggestions on how to overcome these, and how this will benefit navigators, all agencies, and children and their families.
- A dedicated website for custody navigators should be developed and regularly updated to reflect their model of support. Alternatively, printed leaflets with all required information for children and parents could be developed so that they can take this away and read later when stress and anxiety levels have lessened.

### **Programme monitoring and evaluation**

- Currently there is no data that is recorded by the navigators that enables evaluation of the impact of their work to be undertaken. Therefore, the navigators should consider collecting and recording data that evidences the distance travelled of children they engage with. This could include collecting data with a young person pre (i.e. in the custody setting) and post (e.g. at an intervention end point/predetermined time period) their engagement with the navigators, detailing their self-assessed levels of need across several domains (e.g. emotional wellbeing, family and peer relationships, substance use, education, decision making and behaviours, feelings of safety). This may also help children to discuss needs they may have with the navigators and could assist the navigators in terms of tailoring the support they provide (both in custody and in the community). This type of data collected in the custody environment could be analysed to provide a description of the different types of needs which children in custody have. The feasibility of collecting this data should be assessed by the navigators and the steering group, including identification of any relevant validated tools which could be implemented subsequent piloting of such tools with young people by the navigators.
- The impact of the work of the navigators on children's offending outcomes could be measured by using the data tracker to record, with support from the police or MVRP, whether those who engage with the navigators go on to commit further offences at a fixed point in time (e.g. 3-months, 6-months, 12-months post engagement). The feasibility of recording this data, including allocation of this task to the most appropriate staff should be considered by the steering group.
- Further edits could be made to the data tracker to streamline the data recording process for the navigators and to better evidence the work they undertake with children. This may include creation of new variables, deletion of unnecessary variables, and ensuring that the data, if possible, is kept together within one spreadsheet.
  - Deletion of variables that are likely unnecessary in the context of the custody navigator programme and for future evaluations include: 1) Religion; 2) First language; 3) Outcome of arrest; and 4) If out of area what LA. Duplication of 1) Local authority; and 2) Wellbeing/FTA wellbeing should also be removed.

- Addition of suggested variables are: 1) For those who engage in the community add 'open date' and 'closed date' variables; 2) Those who have actually engaged in the community; and 3) The length of time that those engaged in the community are supported for.
- We recommend collecting some data on pre- and post-navigator support outcomes. This will allow impact/distance travelled for children who engage with the support to be assessed i.e. this is where they are in custody when arrested, before navigator support, and this is where they are after navigator support.
  - The Outcome Star may be useful for this (this will incur a cost to purchase, and navigator training is required before they can have an individual license) as the child, with yourself, will score themselves from 0-10 (0 struggling, 10 not struggling) on a number of domains. This may be helpful in designing a child's support plan. There is a large variety of Outcome Stars available to suit different services and cohorts of service users.
  - The Child and Youth Resilience Measure be useful for this (no cost to purchase). This includes 12 items measuring youth resilience levels scored on a 5-point scale (1 does not describe me at all, 5 describes me a lot).

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# 1. Introduction

The impact of child involvement in crime and violence is a wide-reaching public health issue at both local and national level (Krug et al., 2002). Research demonstrates that children who are engaged in criminal activities between the ages of 10 to 17 are more likely to continue to commit crimes into adulthood and across their life course (Farrington, 2012) with recent statistics revealing a reoffending rate of 32.5% for children aged 10-17 years in England and Wales for the year ending March 2024 (Youth Endowment Fund, 2025). Children can be perpetrators or victims of violence, or both, with serious consequences for their health and wellbeing and future life chances, as well as impacting their families and communities (Krug et al., 2002; Mercy et al., 2017). For children who have been arrested, involvement with criminal justice can have long lasting negative impacts on them including disrupted education (Goldson, 2000), reduced employment opportunities (Ackerman et al., 2024), and feelings of shame and stigma (Moore & Tangney, 2017; Taylor, 2016).

A number of risk factors that predict children's engagement in crime and violence are identified in the extant literature and are complex and interconnected, involving individual, family, community, and societal factors (Ayano et al., 2024; Farrington, 2012; Jones et al., 2011; Wojciechowski, 2018; World Health Organisation, 2023). At individual and family level, the impact of ACEs including exposure to domestic violence, parental drug and alcohol use, parental criminality, and a lack of effective parental supervision can all contribute to the likelihood of children engaging in crime (Burke et al., 2023; Villadsen et al., 2025). Societal risk-factors such as poverty and inequality, normalisation of crime, exposure to gang violence and exploitation, and a lack of community cohesion can lead to lack of opportunity for children resulting in engagement in criminal behaviours (Jones et al., 2011; Lightowlers et al., 2023). The World Health Organisation recommends a public health approach to preventing youth violence that addresses the social determinants of violence which it identifies as financial inequality, rapid social and demographic change and low social protection for young people (World Health Organisation, 2023).

## 1.1. Children and Police Custody Settings

Dehaghani (2017) notes that children are "vulnerable by law (but not by nature)". Due to their age and development immaturity, children are considered vulnerable (Brown, 2015) and are reliant upon adults who often are in control of their lives (Dehaghani, 2017; Hendrick, 1997). This is evidenced in limits set on activities children can partake in such as voting, marriage, and school attendance (James & Prout, 1997). However, in the UK is not reflected in the law with a low minimum age of criminal responsibility set at 10 years old (Bevan, 2022). Despite this, since 2008, there has a reduction in child first-time entrants or arrests in the UK attributed to changes in legislation (Bateman & Wigzell, 2020). These legislative changes include diversionary practices wherein police can decide not to prosecute a child but divert them to an intervention for example Operation Inclusion.<sup>1</sup>

Sheahan (2026) reports a disproportionate number of children who experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) or who have neurodevelopmental disorders such as ADHD within the criminal justice system. In the year ending March 2023, over 54,000 children had been arrested and taken to police custody (Home Office, 2023) where they can spend up to 11 hours, and some, overnight in cells which are purpose built for adults (Bevan, 2024). It is reported that negative experiences in police custody

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<sup>1</sup> Operation Inclusion is a 'deferred prosecution scheme' which works with children and young people aged 10-17 who have been linked with drugs and/or violent crime and puts support in place to prevent their offending behaviour from continuing or escalating. <https://www.merseysidevrp.com/what-we-do/preventing-offending/>

can negatively impact children (and adults) long-term and does not act as a deterrent for future engagement with criminal justice system (Bevan, 2022).

Given the nature of the custody environment as being a place of power and control, it may be difficult to achieve a truly trauma-informed (Box 1) custody environment (Miller & Najavits, 2012; SAMSHA, 2014). However, in the UK, a number of trauma-informed interventions have been set out as part of a public health approach to preventing crime and violence, in line with the UK Government's Serious Violence Strategy (HM Government, 2018). These include custody navigator programmes implemented within custody suites which aim to reach children who have been detained for a suspected criminal offence. These diversionary initiatives utilise the 'teachable' moment in police custody, when a child or young person may be more likely to reflect on their situation and behaviour. Through conversations

**Box 1: Key Principles of Trauma-Informed Practice (SAMSHA, 2014)**

**Safety:** Service users feel physically and psychologically safe; safety is considered in the physical setting and promoted in interpersonal interactions.

**Trustworthiness and transparency:** The organisation is transparent in its decisions and operations in order to build trust with service users, families, staff, and other partners.

**Peer support:** Collaboration with individuals with lived experience of trauma to promote recovery and healing.

**Collaboration and mutuality:** Power and decision-making are shared and input from all organisational levels is valued.

**Empowerment, voice, and choice:** Individual's strengths and experiences are recognised and built upon; service users are supported in shared decision-making and goal setting.

**Cultural, historic and gender issues:** Moving beyond stereotypes and biases to be responsive to the racial, ethnic, and cultural needs of different individuals.

with children, navigators can identify any underlying causes for offending behaviour and address risk factors for reoffending or future involvement in crime, taking a whole-person, holistic approach (HM Government, 2018; Weir et al., 2022). If a child chooses to engage fully with navigators they can take part in an assessment of needs and ensure signposting to relevant agencies, as well as develop an action plan for the CYP after release from custody (Hogan-Lloyd et al., 2024).

There is some evidence that trauma-informed interventions delivered by youth justice services are successful in reducing child rates of crime (Wong et al., 2023) and result in better outcomes for children (Quigg et al., 2023). However, evidence of the impact of custody-based interventions and whether they achieve their intended outcomes is difficult to measure (Wilson et al., 2025). Some examples of custody navigator programmes in the UK include the 'Cleveland Police Custody Navigator Scheme' launched in 2023 (College of Policing, 2024), the YEF-funded 'DIVERT Programme' for children aged 10–14 in Lambeth, London (Wong et al., 2023), and the 'Liaison & Diversion' custody navigator programme in Durham (Weir et al., 2022).

## 1.2. Rationale for Evaluation

Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP) along with youth justice and police partners identified a gap in provision for a Child First<sup>2</sup> and trauma-informed approach to children in police custody. Child First has developed from research into the impact on children in custody of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) which found the experience of being treated as an offender before a child to be distressing, punitive and damaging to children and young people's (children) trust in police and the youth justice service. The Child First approach treats children in contact with YJS and

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<sup>2</sup> Child First is the guiding principle for the youth justice sector, that sees children as children, treats them fairly and helps them to build on their strengths <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-the-child-first-framework-in-youth-justice-services>

police as children before offenders, empowering them to engage in the process, reducing the negative impacts of police and youth justice service contact and working towards positive outcomes.

In 2025, MVRP funded a custody navigator programme based within Copy Lane Custody Police Station. This intended to employ 2-3 full-time navigators through Sefton Council who would work with children aged 10-17 years. The primary aim of the programme is to divert children away from the criminal justice system, specifically violent crime. The role of the navigators is first and foremost; to provide children with support in a time of crisis, wherein the navigator will identify their needs and develop a plan of support for the child. Other ongoing support includes providing information and signposting to appropriate services such as education, training, drugs and alcohol services, employment, accommodation, and financial advice. The custody navigator programme has the potential to engage with children and families who may not yet be known to any services or receiving any supports thus potentially capturing these children and diverting them away from the criminal justice system.

### 1.3. Evaluation Aims

This project aimed to conduct a feasibility and pilot study of the custody navigators programme within Copy Lane Custody Suite. The feasibility and pilot study was implemented in two complementary phases each addressing several research questions.

#### 1.3.1. Phase 1: Feasibility of implementation study

This phase aimed to better understand the feasibility of implementing the custody navigator programme and generate knowledge for future implementation. This included answering the following questions:

- Can the programme be delivered as planned (fidelity)?
- Does the programme implementation plan need refining?
- What is the programme recruitment, retention, and reach?
- How much of the programme is received by children (dose)?
- What factors support or impede programme delivery?
- What are children and practitioner's views and experiences of the programme?

#### 1.3.2. Phase 2: Pilot study

The pilot study aimed to assess the feasibility of measuring the impact of the custody navigator programme, to inform a potential future impact study in year two of programme delivery. This included answering the following questions:

- What is the feasibility of measuring impact at an individual and service level?
- What are the emerging mechanisms of change, for whom and why?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Methods

#### 2.1.1. Review of Programme Documentation

Documentation and materials produced throughout the design and implementation of the custody navigator programme were reviewed and collated. This documentation was at a programme level and did not contain any identifiable data. This included implementation and delivery plans, promotion material, steering group minutes, and monitoring forms. Relevant information collected through programme documentation review is used throughout the findings section to complement data collected by other methods. This information was collated using the TIDierPHP (Template for Intervention Description and Replication for population health programmes) reporting guideline (Appendix 1). TIDierPHP is a validated 12-item checklist used to describe the structure and content of all interventions received by the target groups (Campbell et al., 2018).

#### 2.1.2. Review and Analysis of Programme Monitoring Data

Custody navigator programme monitoring data is routinely collected by the navigators and includes information on demographics, risk factors and needs, offending, and custody outcomes. Programme monitoring data covered the period between 8<sup>th</sup> April 2025 and 5<sup>th</sup> March 2026. The data was reviewed to understand the programme's reach, uptake by children offered the programme, custody outcomes, length of engagement, and activities. Initially, it was intended that the navigators would collect secondary outcome data for the evaluation, using the Rosenberg 10-item self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1979) to gain insight into how children feel about themselves through self-worth, social interactions, and motivations. These changes would likely be achieved before longer term outcomes such as reoffending, thus providing a more in-depth understanding of the impacts of the programme. However, it was not feasible for the navigators to collect this data during the pilot phase at first, due to time constraints as there was only one navigator in post for the first three months of the programme and a lot of time was taken up with onboarding systems, and familiarising with local authority procedures and policies. Following the second navigator being in post, navigators began to collect data using the self-esteem scale but observed negative changes in children's body language while attempting to complete the survey and therefore it was decided, with consultation from the steering group, that it was not suitable to collect this data from children in custody.

#### 2.1.3. Qualitative Interviews & Case Studies

Interviews were carried out with stakeholders ( $n=12$ ) from police, MVRP, youth justice, and Mersey Care, children who were supported by custody navigators ( $n=3$ ), and parents of children who were supported by custody navigators ( $n=2$ ), to explore how the custody navigator programme at Copy Lane works, any barriers and facilitators to implementation, and emerging outcomes and impacts of the programme for children in custody. Case studies ( $n=5$ ) were gathered through face-to-face, interview-style discussions with custody navigators to gather information on children's journey from custody to the subsequent support and tailored provision they received.

### 2.2. Data analysis

Qualitative interviews were transcribed verbatim and then imported into NVivo (v15) software where they were coded and thematically analysed. Analysis of monitoring data provided by custody navigators were undertaken in SPSS (v28) using descriptive statistics. The findings of both qualitative and quantitative analyses were triangulated with collated literature to provide findings and recommendations.

### 2.3. Ethical Approval

Full ethical approval was obtained from Liverpool John Moores University Research Ethics Committee (Ref: 25/PHI/005).

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Overview of Custody Navigators at Copy Lane

#### 3.1.1. Catalyst: 'Let's aim high'

The catalyst for the Custody navigators programme came from a number of individuals who work in youth justice, youth work, and criminal justice who observed a pertinent need for custody suites to be more child-friendly, trauma-informed, and consider child-specific needs such as neurodiversity, mental health, and wider family concerns. Merseyside VRP and Police carried out a visit to the youth custody suite in Cleveland, Middlesbrough to observe how their custody navigator model worked (College of Policing, 2024). They also identified from the existing evidence that the navigators would be best placed within the youth justice service due to their "in-house training, knowledge, support, already well-established links between the local authorities across Merseyside" (Stakeholder 3). This was then followed by a scoping review of available custody suites in Merseyside by MVRP, and it was felt that the programme would work best at Copy Lane custody suite due it being larger in size than the other custody suites. At time of writing, there were two custody navigators employed at Copy Lane.

"When I first started, our director asked me, so what do you want at the VRP? And I thought, well, let's aim high ... I want my own custody suite for kids please ... We visited the custody centre up in Middlesbrough ... and then from there, it was just further scoping in terms of custody suites, making sure the right people were on board"  
(Stakeholder 3).

All stakeholders interviewed felt that the primary aim of the custody navigator programme was to reduce re-offending and to divert children away from the criminal justice system. This would be achieved by supporting children following arrest through tailored intervention activities dependent upon each child's individual needs. It was noted by the custody navigators that a significant concern following arrest was the length of time a child was under bail conditions (e.g. not allowed to go to school, not allowed to be in certain areas of their locality, curfew to a specific address and specific times) which was disruptive to areas of their life, primarily education. It was at this time the custody navigators endeavoured to engage regularly with children and their families.

"It's gonna reduce re-entrance into custody suites for children. It's gonna bridge that gap if children are either no further actioned (NFA) or bailed for long periods of time"  
(Stakeholder 3).

#### 3.1.2. Engaging children in custody: "It's a nice calming environment"

Typical custody engagement includes a navigator meeting with the child in a cell or the breakout room to complete initial screening to collect information about the child which is recorded on a data tracker sheet to determine the child's immediate needs. This could include a mental health assessment with one of the liaison and diversion (L&D) team, tools for dysregulation, food, calling a parent or guardian, or other services. These are flexible however and based upon each child's needs at the time. Several adaptations were made to the traditional custody environment to facilitate one-to-one engagement between children and the custody navigators. Given the potential for dysregulation, neurodiversity, or mental health needs, a purpose-built 'breakout' room was developed which includes sofa's and murals on each wall to create a relaxing, "less sterile" (Stakeholder 5) environment for the child (Appendix 2). The breakout room has access to consultation rooms and a medical room if needed. Distraction packs are made available to children in custody which include a ball, glow in the dark orb, suction worm toy, fidget spinners, and chalk to be used on chalkboards in child-friendly cells. Distraction pack tools such as fidget spinners are used to help regulate a child's mood. Tools such as fidget spinners and the furniture placed in the breakout room needed to be risk assessed for their suitability in a custody setting.

“They now have their own little room that is less a sterile environment in terms of it's got murals on the walls. It's a nice calming environment with comfortable sofas in it. There are a number of diversionary techniques, or techniques that keep the attention or regulate behaviour within the custody suite ... we've got distraction toys, effectively that have been approved for the custody environment because we have to be aware that suicide is a major risk ... these sorts of tools have to be checked for health and safety effectively. So, there are toys that they can be given within a custody cell where they can entertain themselves, regulate their moods” (Stakeholder 5).

“Naively, we can't just go and buy a telly. Because obviously it'd have to be risk assessed. They have to be sure that they are unbreakable to the best of everyone's knowledge. Even the testing that was put into place to ensure that the engagement and distraction tools so like your fidget spinners, that type of stuff are indestructible, was extensive” (Stakeholder 2).

At the time of writing this report, a TV has also been put in place in the breakout room which is intended to be used to display educational videos explaining a number of things including the custody experience, the law, bail conditions etc. However, at the time of writing, this was not yet up and running.

“There's also now a TV within that environment so they can watch educational videos or things that the navigators think that will help that individual through that process. The navigators also talk them through what's going to happen, what's expected. They can be that conduit between the child and the custody Sergeant and custody staff, to keep them calm” (Stakeholder 5).

Consideration was given to the stark reality of the custody suite experience for a child following an arrest. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of addressing these concerns by having the correct tools and diversionary activities in place from the beginning of implementation.

“We understand that the custody environment is a difficult one to process at the best of times, but specifically when you're a child. You've got all those emotions. You're in a very sterile environment with a lot of adults that you don't know, authoritative positions. You might not necessarily have the coping strategies, or ability to regulate your behaviour ... we understand that the custody process can be very scary, frightening specifically with children who have SEND needs, neurodivergence, it's important to recognise those and have people there who have the abilities to regulate and help them regulate those behaviours to make it a more comfortable stay. One, for the individual that's in custody, but also a safer environment for the people who work within the custody suites as well” (Stakeholder 5).

Four cells within the custody suite were also adapted to create a more relaxing environment for children. This included vinyl ceiling cover with a “space-scape”<sup>3</sup> scene, a chalk wall, and digital clocks (see Appendix 2 for images of all). The space-scape was co-produced by police and children engaged with youth justice so that it was relevant and useable. It was felt that the clocks were an important addition to support both police and custody navigators as children can be either more or less anxious if they have awareness of the time resulting in them calling for custody police assistance regularly. The clocks can be either on or off depending on what each individual child prefers.

“We obviously were looking at what made the suite less impactful, a negative experience, so particularly in those young person cells, we considered the ceiling to get

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<sup>3</sup> A vinyl ceiling cover with a panoramic view of outer space.

the vinyl all done. So that was quite a process, getting some artwork or some creative to conceive that, which obviously we've got the space-scape, and we did quite a lot of, you know, [name] asked youth justice kids about what they would want in the cell. So, we made sure that it was appropriate" (Stakeholder 7).

"Clocks have been put in so they can see the time. Because we find that one of the biggest things within a cell is that people lose track of time and it can really cause anxiousness and dysregulate behaviour. So, clocks have now been put in so they can keep track. They can understand where they are, what's going on, what sort of time they've been in for. So, the navigators will go in, they'll have conversations with them" (Stakeholder 5).

### 3.1.3. Programme Dose and Reach

Any child aged 10-17 years, from any local authority, who is arrested and taken to Copy Lane is eligible for custody navigator support. Between 8<sup>th</sup> April 2025 to 5<sup>th</sup> March 2026, 132 children who were arrested and brought to Copy Lane were offered custody navigator support and therefore recorded in the monitoring data tracker sheet. The majority (83.6%;  $n=102$ ) of the children agreed to be seen by the navigators while in custody. Some of the reasons recorded for children not being seen in custody by the navigators included the navigators being unavailable (due to there being more children in custody than navigators at one time), the young person being considered too high risk, or due to other specific circumstances in custody that meant it would not be possible or appropriate for the navigators to engage with that child (e.g. a priority incident taking place in custody, so staff were not available to support navigators engagement).

Half (50.0%;  $n=62$ ) of the children consented to follow up support with the navigators in the community. Some of the reasons recorded for children not consenting to or engaging with further support included young people not wanting support, the young person being from out of area, the young person being remanded or in a secure setting, the navigators not being able to get in contact with the young person, or the young person already having multiple services involved so the navigators in these circumstances did not provide further support. Of the children who consented to follow up support in the community, two thirds (65.5%;  $n=36$ )<sup>4</sup> engaged with the support that was offered. Some of the reasons recorded for children not consenting to or engaging with further support included young people not wanting support, the young person being from out of area, the young person being remanded or in a secure setting, the navigators not being able to get in contact with the young person, or the young person already having multiple services involves do the navigators in these circumstances did not provide further support.

### 3.1.4. Demographics

The majority of children offered custody navigator support were males (87.1%;  $n=115$ ), White British (93.2%;  $n=123$ ), and aged 15-17 years (76.5%;  $n=101$ ; Table 1). There were higher proportions of children in the custody navigators monitoring data from Sefton, Liverpool, and Knowsley, compared to from St. Helens. There was only one young person from Wirral in the monitoring data. Children out of area are eligible to be seen by navigators while in custody but are not eligible for follow-up support in the community.

The sociodemographics of those who were seen by the navigators in custody and who consented to follow up support broadly matched the demographics of the children in the monitoring data overall.

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<sup>4</sup> There were a number of children who consented to support for whom data on their engagement was missing ( $n=7$ ). Therefore, the percentage that engaged with support is from a base of children who consented to support and where data on their engagement was available ( $n=55$ ).

However, there was a slightly higher proportion of those aged 12-14 years who consented to follow up support with the navigators.

*Table 1: Sociodemographics of children offered custody navigator support, all children in the custody navigators monitoring data (n=132)*

	<b>All children % (n)</b>	<b>Seen by navigators in custody % (n)</b>	<b>Consented to follow up support % (n)</b>
<b>All</b>	100.0 (132)	83.6 (102)	50.0 (62)
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	87.1 (115)	87.3 (89)	87.1 (54)
Female	12.9 (17)	12.7 (13)	12.9 (8)
<b>Age (years)</b>			
12-14	23.5 (31)	26.5 (27)	32.3 (20)
15-17	76.5 (101)	73.5 (75)	67.7 (42)
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White British	93.2 (123)	93.1 (95)	93.5 (58)
Other ethnicities	6.8 (9)	6.9 (7)	6.5 (4)
<b>Local authority</b>			
Knowsley	17.4 (23)	15.7 (16)	19.4 (12)
Liverpool	20.5 (27)	20.6 (21)	24.2 (15)
Sefton	33.3 (44)	32.4 (33)	33.9 (21)
St. Helens	9.1 (12)	7.8 (8)	11.3 (7)
Wirral	0.8 (1)	1.0 (1)	0.0 (0)
Out of area	18.9 (25)	22.5 (23)	11.3 (7)

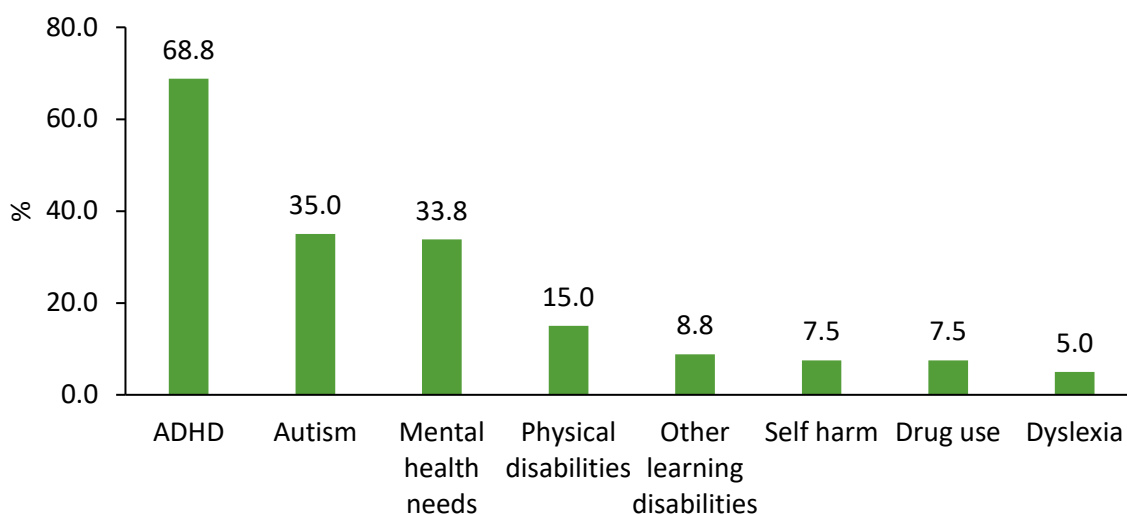
### 3.1.5. Risk Factors and Needs

Of the children in the custody navigators monitoring data, six in ten (59.1%;  $n=78$ ) were known to any services, a quarter (25.2%;  $n=32$ ) were recorded as a looked after child, and just over half (52.3%;  $n=69$ ) had some form of social care involvement.

Over six in ten (63.0%;  $n=80$ ) were recorded as having a disability or health need, and half (52.8%;  $n=67$ ) had some form of neurodivergence. Of those who were recorded of having a disability or health need, the most commonly recorded type of disability was ADHD (68.8%; Figure 1).<sup>5</sup>

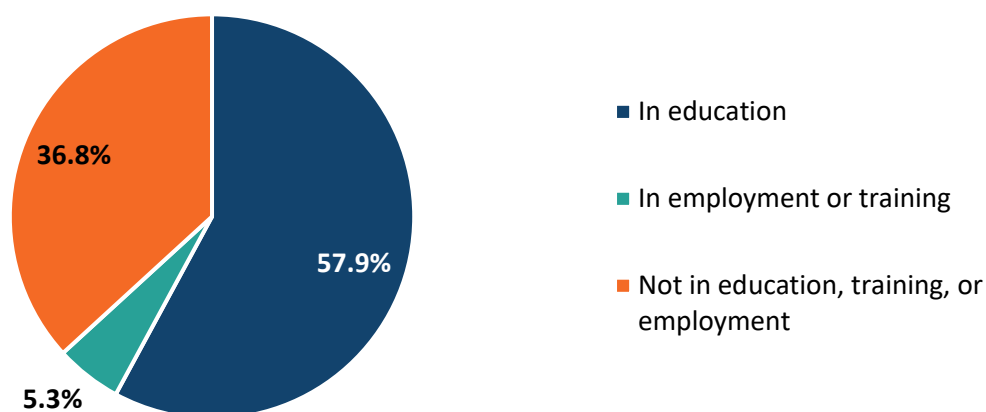
<sup>5</sup> Summing percentages here does not equal 100% as one individual could have multiple disabilities and therefore be coded into multiple categories.

*Figure 1: Proportions with different types of disabilities, of children in the custody navigators monitoring data who were recorded as having a disability or health need (n=80)*



Education data was only available for a small proportion of children (28.8%;  $n=38$ ). Of these, over half (57.9%;  $n=22$ ) were in education, and a small proportion (5.3%;  $n=2$ ) were employed or in training. However, over a third (36.8%;  $n=14$ ) of children were not in any form of education, training, or employment (Figure 2).

*Figure 2: Education, training, and employment status of children in the custody navigators monitoring data (n=38)<sup>6</sup>*



There were no significant differences in the proportions of children who were seen by the navigators in custody or those who consented for follow up support, by whether the young person was known to services, was a looked after child, had social care involvement, or had a disability (Table 2). Differences by education, training, and employment status were not assessed due to the small numbers for whom this data was available.

<sup>6</sup> Due to the education status measure being added to the navigators monitoring data as the programme progressed data is only available for a small sample of children ( $n=38$ ).

*Table 2: Needs of children offered custody navigator support, all children in the custody navigators monitoring data (n=132)*

	<b>All children % (n)</b>	<b>Seen by navigators in custody % (n)</b>	<i>p</i>	<b>Consented to follow up support % (n)</b>	<i>p</i>
<b>All</b>	100.0 (132)	83.6 (102)		50.0 (62)	
<b>Known to services</b>					
Yes	59.1 (78)	84.9 (62)		55.4 (41)	
No	40.9 (54)	81.6 (40)	0.816	42.0 (21)	0.200
<b>Looked after child</b>					
Yes	25.2 (32)	86.7 (26)		38.7 (12)	
No	74.8 (95)	81.6 (71)	0.724	54.5 (48)	0.191
<b>Social care involvement</b>					
Yes	52.3 (69)	82.8 (53)		50.8 (33)	
No	47.7 (63)	84.5 (49)	0.997	49.2 (29)	1.000
<b>Disability or health need</b>					
Yes	63.0 (80)	85.9 (67)		52.5 (42)	
No	37.0 (47)	79.5 (31)	0.535	46.2 (18)	0.649

### 3.1.6. Offending

Of the children in the custody navigators monitoring data, just under half (44.7%;  $n=59$ ) of the offences committed were for physical violence, including common (Section 39) assaults and assaults of an emergency worker (22.7%;  $n=30$ ), and assault causing actual bodily harm (Section 47) (17.4%;  $n=23$ ; Figure 3).<sup>7</sup> After offences involving physical violence, theft or robbery offences were the next most common offence type (25.0%;  $n=33$ ; Figure 3).

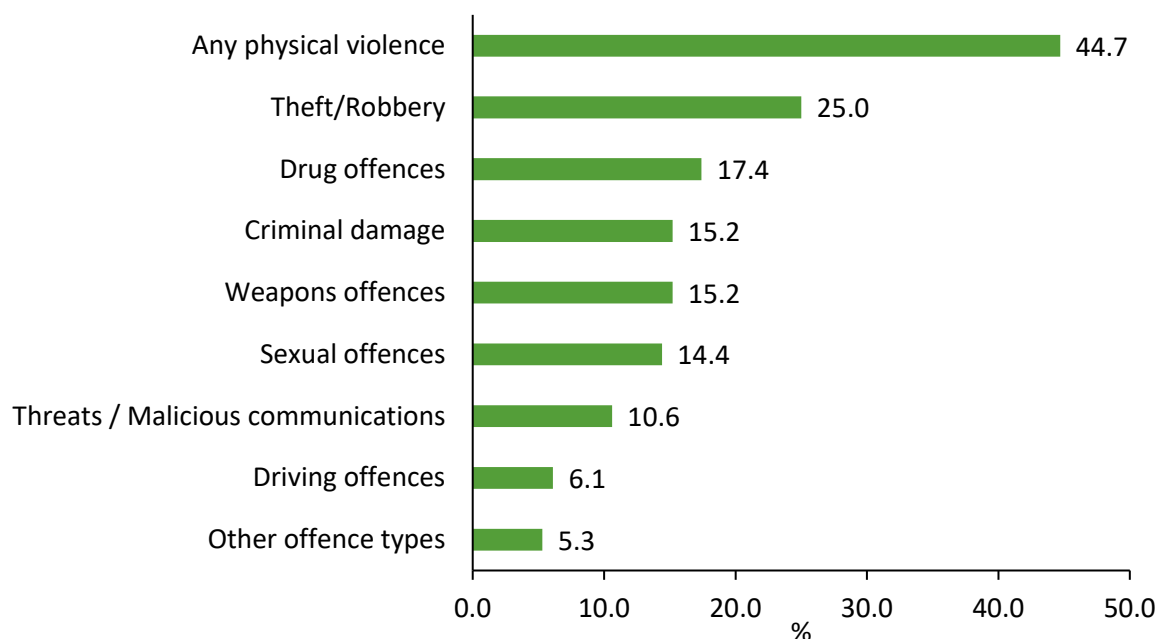
Where data was available for children (28.0%;  $n=37$ ), half (51.4%;  $n=19$ ) were first time attendants in the custody suite, while 48.6% ( $n=18$ ) had previous custody attendances.

Arrests for a physically violent offence were significantly higher among females (76.5%;  $n=13$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), children known to services (53.8%;  $n=42$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) children who were looked after (68.8%;  $n=22$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and children who had children's social care involvement (56.5%;  $n=39$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). There were no significant differences in the proportion of children who were arrested for a physically violent offence by age disability status.

There were no significant differences in the proportions of children who were seen by the navigators in custody or who consented for follow up support, by whether the young person was arrested for a physically violent offence. Differences by whether the young person was a first-time attendant at police custody were not assessed due to there being small numbers of children where this data was available.

<sup>7</sup> Summing these percentages together does not equal the total percent with physically violent offences, as some offences may involve physical violence but not fit into either of these categories (e.g. 'violence against the person' or 'affray').

Figure 3: Offence types of children in the custody navigators monitoring data, , all children in the custody navigators monitoring data (n=132)<sup>8</sup>



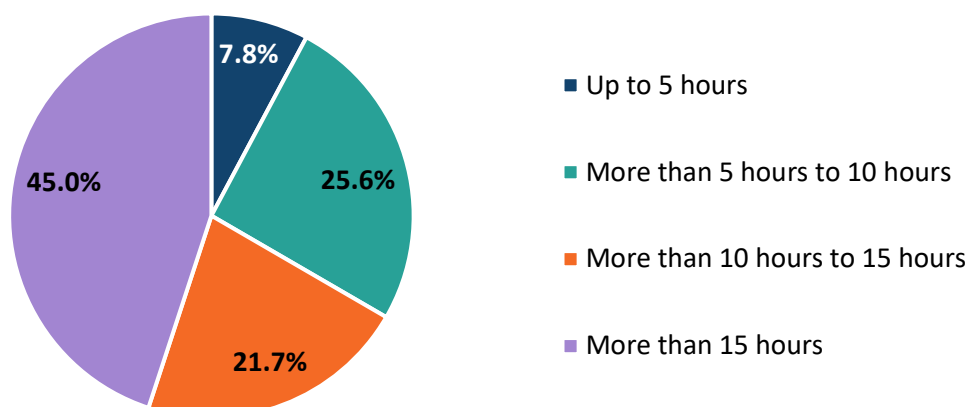
### 3.1.7. Custody Experiences

Where data was available for children (28.8%;  $n=38$ ), over four in ten (44.7%;  $n=17$ ) attendances to the custody suite/arrests involved police using handcuffs/restraints to detain the child. Three quarters (73.7%;  $n=28$ ) were recorded only as being calm/regulated/engaging, while a quarter (26.3%;  $n=10$ ) had any indication that they were potentially anxious, upset, or dysregulated recorded by the custody navigators. Three quarters (73.0%;  $n=27$ ) were provided with some form of distraction pack, including a ball, fidget toys, chalk, or a book. Where such resources were not provided it was because the young person did not want these.

Of the children ( $n=132$ ) offered custody navigator support, over four in ten (45.0%;  $n=58$ ) spent more than 15 hours in this setting, two in ten (21.7%;  $n=28$ ) spent more than 10 hours and up to 15 hours in custody, a quarter (25.6%;  $n=33$ ) spent more than 5 hours and up to 10 hours, and less than one in ten (7.8%;  $n=10$ ) children spent up to 5 hours in custody (Figure 4). A significantly smaller proportion of children who had a disability (36.4%;  $n=28$ ) compared to those who did not (59.6%;  $n=28$ ) spent 15+ hours in police custody ( $p<0.05$ ). A non-significantly ( $p=0.054$ ) smaller proportion of children who consented for follow up support (35.0%;  $n=21$ ) compared to those who did not (54.1%;  $n=33$ ) spent 15+ hours in police custody. There were no differences in the proportion of children spending 15+ hours in police custody by gender, age, whether the young person was known to services, was a looked after child, or had social care involvement, or was seen by the navigators in custody. Differences by whether the young person's attendance at custody/arrest involved the use of force, children's wellbeing in custody, and provision of distraction packs were not assessed due to there being small numbers of children where this data was available.

<sup>8</sup> Other offence types include hate crimes ( $n=4$ ), harassment/stalking offences ( $n=3$ ), and resisting/obstructing an officer ( $n=2$ ). Summing percentages here does not equal 100% as one individual could have been arrested for multiple types of offences and therefore be coded into multiple categories.

Figure 4: Duration of time children spent in police custody, all children in the custody navigators monitoring data (n=132)



## 3.2. Programme Implementation and Delivery

### 3.2.1. Facilitators: "It's a team effort"

The overall feeling in interviews was that the custody navigators were at the heart of successful delivery of the programme with participants noting the navigators commitment and proactive approach to embedding themselves within the custody environment and ensuring young people had the support they needed.

"In my opinion, it wouldn't have been so successful if it wasn't for the two navigators that we've got. They are genuinely pretty special individuals, who are invested in what they do ... they go over and above what is expected of them to ensure that their young person has got all the tools to stay away from criminality" (Stakeholder 5).

"They're (navigators) so well embedded, they've embedded themselves. And I mean, that's one of the challenges, isn't it, that they have to do a lot of work themselves to get that, there's no hand holding for them in that environment. So, all the relationships that they've built, you know, they've had some help along the way, but they've done it themselves. I think that's been really important" (Stakeholder 7).

Stakeholders noted that the custody navigators are especially skilled at building trusting relationships with children in custody and sustaining these relationships with children and families in the community. This was supported by the amount of time the navigators spend with children in custody, and the availability of a dedicated break out room to carry out engagement.

"Because they've got the time to spend with them and they have that ability to sit sometimes for an hour, 2 hours, 3 hours; they can spend as much time with them as they need to. And it's not just about a quick "how you doing, what are you up to" ... they will spend that time to sit down, they'll do things with them, you know they'll play games, bit of hangman, bit of whatever. They will do something with them to try and break down those barriers that kids see" (Stakeholder 6).

"They've built up such fantastic relationships with children and families who have been so resistant to accessing any support previously. And we've been able to kind of broker relationships with, say, children's social care where they've basically before shut the door

on them and said you're not coming in. But with the navigators, they've been able to, you know, we've had a number of families who've said, I'll let the social worker in if you're with me. Or I'll go to that meeting if you're there. So those, you know without that, I think you know there would be a number of families who still wouldn't be at a point where they are being able to be assessed by children's social care for those wider family needs" (Stakeholder 4).

Stakeholders also felt that the navigators looking and acting differently to their police colleagues facilitated young people's engagement, especially where families may have had previous negative experiences with police or social care. Participating parents agreed that the navigators informal approach made them and their child feel at ease, even when their child had struggled to engage with services in the past.

"They don't want to talk to us (police) no matter how nice we are and how pleasant and how nice we come across. We still wear a uniform, and we are still the police, and they won't talk to us, but they will talk to them because they look like youth workers. They look like people who aren't involved in the police. They don't wear a uniform; it's not a formal process like it is with us" (Stakeholder 6).

"She doesn't look like a policeman coming into the house. She doesn't look like a social worker coming into the house. She's young, she's modern, you can tell she's got her own style and different things. And [child] got his own kind of different style. So, I think things like that really helped because there's been times in the past where we've had, whether it's police, whether it's social work that have come in and they've not engaged with [child] in the right way to understand him, so he's been quite standoffish with them, or he's just not been engaged or opened his mind to what they're talking about (Parent 1).

Buy-in from other partners and the multi-agency approach was noted as being a facilitating factor for programme delivery including police "I think the support from the police in terms of setting it up. I think that's been great" (Stakeholder 3); the L&D team "... they are in an office with our L&D, our mental health team, they are able to come up with a plan together and able to discuss the child, and it's useful to share that information" (Stakeholder 10); Sefton youth justice "... been the safeguarding, in terms of local authorities" (Stakeholder 2); and the two custody navigators. Police understanding and acceptance of the intervention (which is welcomed by the staff at Copy Lane custody suite) has meant that any changes, adaptations, or new suggestions are easily quickly progressed. This is further supported by a custody Sergeant who has the ability to approve and put into practice any new suggestions or changes.

"What we've seen is probably they've (police) been a lot more welcoming and a lot more on board than what we'd anticipated as well. So, I think that's facilitated the ability to be able to kind of get things in place a lot quicker where that resistance hasn't been happening. And an openness I think to kind of think about actually how can we do something different and take on board the ideas that the navigators have got, and the same with the health teams as well. That working together has worked really well, and that sharing of information has been quite fluid" (Stakeholder 4).

"We've got a custody Sergeant [name], who's heavily involved. Who's able to, when one of us potentially comes up with a bit of an idea, for her to go, is that going to work in the real world? ... There are loads of supporters. I've not really faced any kind of massive resistance because it's benefiting everyone" (Stakeholder 3).

That police and those working in the custody suite are trauma-informed trained<sup>9</sup> was largely viewed as a reason the custody navigator programme is working well. Not only are custody staff accepting of the intervention within their workplace, but there is evidence of a shift in attitudes and perceptions of children who have been arrested, demonstrating cultural change. Critically, one stakeholder noted that they now consider the potential that a child who has been arrested may be a victim of crime such as exploitation, whereas they may not have considered this in the past.

“The trauma training was really interesting for me because it put things into perspective ... I just always have in my head that they're inherently vulnerable and they're either being exploited criminally or whatever, even if they go, I want to be a gangster when I grow up and I want to do all these naughty things. That's fine, that's a choice. But what's made that choice” (Stakeholder 12).

“In the background, we're doing all the trauma informed training. So, we wanted to make sure that it wasn't just putting a programme into a suite that wasn't willing to accept it ... we set up a bespoke trauma-informed training for custody as well to make sure that all of their staff had all four in-person sessions” (Stakeholder 7).

Of significant interest is the change in language and terminology used by police within Copy Lane regarding children who have been arrested. As part of a trauma-informed approach and something that was first brought into play by MVRP, is the use of the word 'child' rather than using the word 'juvenile' which is the word used in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (1984) to refer to a child (under 18) who has been arrested. The navigators feel strongly about referring to a child in custody as a 'child' which is now embedded at this custody suite, again demonstrating cultural change within police custody environments. The navigators feel that this results in better engagement from children and in turn, better custody outcomes.

“She [previous VRP Director] made it a part of their sort of command team meetings to reinforce the importance of language. It's difficult because the direct challenge comes back that that's what juveniles what's in PACE ... it's written down, all the legislation they use is there, it's on NICHE, it's everywhere ... we know that the staff are constantly being asked not to use it; they do and then we challenge appropriately at the time” (Stakeholder 7).

“They categorise them as a juvenile and I think it is sad because juvenile is quite a negative word when it comes to crime ... And I think seeing that shift within the station and within, you know, partners calling them children, honestly, their behaviour, their language, and their body language around the Custody Sergeant changes just by them calling them children” (Stakeholder 2).

Stakeholders felt that this change in attitudes and language used within the custody space is a milestone for the criminal justice system, supported by both the trauma-informed police training and the custody navigators encouragement of this use of language.

“We are a difficult breed to break down because people are coming in for serious offences and it's like, well, we're going to get a youth worker in to come and speak to them and it's like, hang on, they're in for murder ... but it's about understanding .. the trauma-informed training which we've done ... and the navigators coming in and talking about things and having chats with the custody sergeants and just saying, 'OK, well, I

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<sup>9</sup> Merseyside's Violence Reduction Partnership runs trauma informed training for public sector organisations to understand how psychological trauma can impact individuals and ensure they consider this for their services. <https://www.merseysidevrp.com/our-projects/trauma-informed-training/>

get that they're in for murder, but ultimately they didn't start here, did they?' ... it's about recognising that the journey doesn't start at murder. Sometimes it does, but not always. And if we'd have managed to intervene earlier, which is obviously their job to do, we might not be in this position that we're in now" (Stakeholder 6).

This change in use of language is likely being embedded as it is being supported in a top-down approach by Merseyside Police as indicated in this quote:

"It was an opportune time for me to start putting things right then, you know, the use of the word juvenile. And I know that's difficult because it's basically something, it's in the legislation, it's a massive culture change, but you know, I've still got inspectors now who go, yeah, but PACE says juvenile and I go, well, you know, it takes a long time to get wording rewritten in anything ... doesn't mean it's right, does it? So that was the first challenge, and I started using that terminology, a child or young person, and it was good to see that coming across in all my communications from then on because it does rub off" (Stakeholder 12).

### 3.2.2. Barriers: "The knock-on effect"

Whilst it was originally intended there would be 2-3 navigators in post at Copy Lane, there was only one in post until August 2025 and there remains only 2 currently. This has been noted as a barrier to implementation and delivery as the navigators are working to capacity and therefore limited to the amount of time they can be in the custody suite. An example of this is noted in the quote below, wherein the navigator can potentially spend a lot of the day travelling to children in the community in their respective local authorities which means they are out of the custody suite for a significant period of time. Furthermore, it has come to light that the navigators are not only supporting the child but quite often there is follow-up whole family support provided which takes more custody time from the navigators.

"I think the other challenge that's just come to me as well is how big our county is in terms of children who access Copy Lane police station. We haven't had any from Wirral to be fair, but our main ones are St. Helens, Knowsley, Liverpool, and Sefton. And it's the travelling between and with a small team that's been a massive challenge. I could be in, near enough in Warrington on the tip of St. Helens in the morning and then be right the way in Southport in the afternoon. So, spending time travelling all the time is... Yeah, that's a massive challenge and obviously the custody aspect as well" (Stakeholder 2).

"I think another challenge as well, which we hadn't anticipated, was the wider family support needs that have been picked up. Particularly around mums and them requiring a lot of support and a lot of guidance and the time that takes from the navigators as well" (Stakeholder 4).

The other difficulty facing the navigators is that processes and procedures relating to referrals into social care and accessing wider support offers differ across local authorities and youth justice services. Stakeholders noted that this takes a considerable amount of time from the navigators' work day, as illustrated in the quote below.

"I think the main issue now what we're facing, which is incredibly tough to work with, is the different processes within each local authority and each YJS [Youth Justice Service]. When we're trying to safeguard children who are coming into custody ... St. Helens, Knowsley, Liverpool, Wirral and Sefton have all got different processes. And as a person who's just trying to get a child protected and safeguarded, it can take a long time, and it

can potentially take anywhere from twenty minutes to speak to someone to two hours”  
(Stakeholder 2).

This has resulted in children’s support plans being extended or open for longer periods of time than were initially intended because navigators feel they can’t close a case if there is no other support in place for that child.

“I think because the processes differ so much across different local authorities, even things like referrals into children’s social care, children accessing wider support, that all looks very different. So, it’s navigating your way around that and then the impact that has on the children then being able to access that support. The knock on to that has been that we then have children who we’re supporting as navigators for a lot longer than what we’d anticipated” (Stakeholder 4).

### 3.2.3. Programme Adaptions

During the pilot phase the custody navigators developed a number of tools and documentation to support their work in the pilot phase including: 1) a monitoring data tracker spreadsheet with columns that include (not exhaustive) date of arrest, nature of alleged offence, time spent in custody, if a child is known to services, local authority, consent to follow-up support, and next steps (this tracker sheet was developed because the navigators do not have their own recording system); 2) a child custody passport (this is intended to support police on duty if a custody navigator is not there at that time) which records demographic data, any additional needs, engagement including use of distraction toys, and any potential support if they present in police custody (Appendix 3); and 3) a navigator log, which includes all engagement and indirect support provided to a child both in and post-custody (Appendix 4). One stakeholder commended the development of the custody passport developed by navigators and how it is beneficial to all custody staff:

“They’ve put things in place such as the custody passports ... there’s a flag on the system, and it contains all the information that the custody Sergeant will need if that person comes in when the navigator isn’t on duty ... so appropriate adult telephone numbers, any health conditions that they’ve got, anything that we need to be aware of, anything like that. So, the impact for the for the custody suite is they are making the custody sergeant’s job easier” (Stakeholder 6).

The navigators also identified a need for interest-based interventions which they have incorporated into the support they can offer to children in the community. These interventions try to embed eco therapeutic practices to support the reduction of stress, anxiety and enable connection thus increasing engagement. The navigators have supported children on a music project hosted by the Red Rum Club, a golf skills workshop, boxing skills, photography, and animal assisted support. Navigators received advice and guidance from the XO Bike Project (a London-based non-profit bike mechanic course for ex-offenders) about how to implement a bike maintenance programme. Both navigators have received bike maintenance training and a qualification from Energise Cycles CIC, and they can now deliver it to children they are supporting. The navigators hope to advance the project by generating income from bike sales, which could ensure the project’s sustainability and provide children with business management skills.

"I also think in terms of sustainability, there is a there is a question on whether certain elements of the project can income generate itself like, for instance, the bike project. We've got a couple of ideas where we could do community auctions of bikes at a maximum level £50 a bike ... that money gets funded back in, but also the children are getting skills like business management ... getting qualifications" (Stakeholder 2).

### 3.3. Experiences of the Programme

Interviews with children ( $n=3$ ) and parents ( $n=2$ ) were carried out to discuss their experiences of engagement with the custody navigators and support provided. Children felt that building a relationship and trust with their navigator was easy and supported by weekly or regular catch-ups. Catching up and having informal one-to-ones were carried out in the car, in the community, or in the home. This was tailored to each child's individual needs.

"Yeah, we'll go in the car. I'll get picked up, we'll go in the car, we'll go somewhere, get like a drink or something to eat and just like have a catch up every week, see if anything's different and changed" (Child 3)

"... to the house sometimes, they've been to Maccy's sometimes, she's had them out at the Beatles Museum because she knows that's his massive interest at the moment ... he loves music anyway, but the Beatles is his massive interest at the moment ... so they've done stuff like that as well, which has really, really helped, you know, engage with them" (Parent 1).

Some parents noted that it took some time for them to build trust and a relationship with the navigator due the fact that on the day of their child's arrest they were confused and stressed and didn't quite take in a lot of what was being said to them at the custody suite. They felt that verbal information would not sink in at such a stressful time and that something on paper or a website dedicated to navigators would have been beneficial at this early stage of support.

"She explained who she was, but I know from my point of view, it was kind of, I still wasn't 100% sure where that fit in because it was just lots of questions. There was solicitors, police, desk sergeant, everything. So, I didn't know where she initially sat, if I'm honest. It's just information, especially verbal, just information overload isn't it. It's a lot all at once, but that kind of when you go back and sit at the house" (Parent 2).

"For me, I kind of went out and started kind of looking at Sefton's website, looking at youth justice and different things. I think something potentially like a handout or an e-mail that explains what they do" (Parent 1).

Children discussed how navigators supported their parents too and how this helped to provide a link between them and other services such as social services and youth services. This was echoed by parents who viewed navigators as a liaison between them and other services.

"And then the meetings above like the social services and that, I've passed [navigator] number over to me social worker and everything. So, when me mum has the meetings, she should be coming to them. So, she's in there with all of them" (Child 3).

"I didn't, I didn't even know a title to be honest, to be perfectly honest with you. I just knew her as [name] and she was a liaison between us and she worked kind of within Sefton, where she worked closely with youth justice, that type of thing ... so she's been very honest with us about things like the bail settings and because it's devices that's involved, you know, she said quite early on that the bail would probably be extended after his first initial three months. So, she's been really honest and open with us that way" (Parent 1).

Children interviewed felt that the aim of the programme was to support them in preventing them from reoffending and to "keep me out of trouble, really" (Child 2). A number of other supports were also noted including emotional support, getting back to education, and social skills.

"To give a lot of support and to just push through and that everything is going to be OK in the end. I think it's a great programme. I really do. I think it's great" (Child 1).

"It's helped me get into college as well ... I didn't want to go to college ... I didn't expect to see other people there that I knew to be honest ... stopped me from getting arrested again" (Child 2).

"She's helping me with my college course to get me on to the learning for entry one" (Child 3).

One parent also discussed the lengths at which the navigators went to support their son's re-entry into education, not only by being a liaison between them and school but also by sharing their own lived experience of school and being more relatable to the child.

"He's applied for different colleges in town, as I say, LA, LMA, different things. He's went for auditions for them. And [name] supported that as well and said that she stayed at 6th form and her friends that went to college completely, you know, had a different mature experience to moving on in life type thing than she did. And she says, you know, she said to him, I wish I'd done it. I wish I'd went to college rather than stayed at 6th form. So, she's been really, really helpful in talking about that now. And he talks now about either going to LIPA or LMA, he doesn't talk about going to 6th form anymore" (Parent 1).

Navigator support was particularly important for another child who found it beneficial to them while under bail conditions and the uncertainty of what will happen in the future while awaiting their court appearance/trial. The navigators would keep in touch with arresting officers and provide any updates regarding this to the child or their family.

"It's just the waiting, the waiting's kind of nerve racking sometimes and it builds up nerves ... Just to find out an answer really ... It would take a lot of weight off my shoulders for sure. Just knowing when it's going to happen and what is going to happen" (Child 1).

One child discussed how the navigators helped her to stay calm and regulate her mood when she was stressed. She also noted that her mother reported her being calmer too.

"I normally just flip dead easy because I'm short tempered, but I've just sat there and remembered that [name] said either think about something or go for a walk or do something that will take your mind off it and just to yourself for a little bit to calm down ... me mum did say I was like a lot more calmer" (Child 3).

Parents also reported the navigators being flexible and adaptable to their child's needs and emotions which often varied week to week.

"She's open and upfront and she'll say, 'listen, if you are feeling \*\*\*\* and you don't want to go out, just tell me'. And I think he's got that trust and confidence to say, 'well, yeah, actually, can we just have a chat, or can we just go and have something to eat? I don't want to ... social battery is low, don't want to see anyone, don't want to do anything'" (Parent 2).

### 3.4. Emerging Outcomes

#### 3.4.1. Individual level: "Every interaction is an intervention"

Whilst it was not possible to measure impact in this pilot phase evaluation, some emerging outcomes can be shared.

One stakeholder who has a background in youth justice services felt that the custody navigator programme has the potential to support children who generally fall through the cracks or do not get picked up by services until they are already entrenched in the criminal justice system with other possible issues such as substance use, trauma, and mental health issues.

"From being a YJS practitioner, I've often said, especially when I was frontline, we've got this kid and family far too late. Why has no one else picked this up? This is based in poverty, generational domestic abuse, generational criminality, substance abuse, all those core ACEs. And then a kid does something wrong and all of a sudden they're in YJS and all of a sudden they've got access to services. It should have been done years before. But if nobody knows, then how can it be done? So, we're getting eyes on these kids because it can be, as I've said before, that they're on bail for a long period, they're no further actioned, or the released under investigation" (Stakeholder 3).

One stakeholder felt that the numbers of children being arrested and not re-entering Copy Lane midway through the pilot were very positive, and that having more navigators and broader support in terms of times and other custody suites could have high potential to reduce reoffending or for diverting children out of the criminal justice system in the longer-term.

"If they were given a 24 hours, seven days a week coverage, the results would be absolutely phenomenal. Because I think as it stood last week, when I was speaking to them last, I think they had 65 youths that have been through the door of custody in Copy Lane since April [2025]. These are people that normally reoffend every other week that are within the criminal justice system, have been for a number of months, and only four have reoffended" (Stakeholder 5).

There were some reports of children who may have been engaged in risky behaviours and not engaging with any support previously who were now participating in activities provided by the custody navigators (such as a bike repair project). This potentially could have long-term impact for any child who may not reoffend again due to this diversionary tool.

"Both of those boys are now involved in my new bike project as well. So then later on in a few months, you'll have the community impact as well. They're also high-profile children who were involved in a lot of activities and who won't engage with any other service" (Stakeholder 2)

#### 3.4.2. Service level: "The Welders"

At service level, the liaison work being carried out by navigators to support and link children and families with other services was widely discussed in interviews. One custody navigator had an interesting viewpoint of their role in this liaison work and how they are bridging the gap that exists between families

and services by inciting trust and relationship building which results in breaking down barriers built through years of trauma and mistrust:

"I call us 'the welders'. It's like if you've got a ship which is trying to be stable in the ocean, if you would drop an anchor, it weathers and it cracks, so you need to replace some of those links. You need to weld. You need to make sure those links stay and are sort of stable. If we're looking at a 12-month point of view when we meet families, those links, those chains are damaged and cracked through trauma, a lack of trust, and everything else. So, with the support of the navigators, we've slowly welded them and replaced those links. And it might be we've replaced a service that they've got involved in" (Stakeholder 2).

Other stakeholders interviewed echoed this sentiment:

"She is seeing that she is referring a lot to social care once she is engaging with the kids out in the community and being that conduit between the child and family to the social worker" (Stakeholder 3).

Other emerging outcomes centred on the positive role navigators play within the custody suite to provide advice and support the custody staff. This was discussed in terms of police time constraints (i.e. busy custody suite reducing the amount of time they can give to making calls to social care, parents etc), understanding and being trained to work with children with neurodiversity, liaising with care homes and parents/guardians, and having the appropriate knowledge and understanding of laws and guidance relating to children in care.

"Previously it was youths are known for ... they get really impatient and they take a lot of time of the custody suite staff, rightly so, they're probably really worried and they're anxious and they just don't want to be there, which nobody wants to be there, but children struggle with things ... because there's a high percentage of children with disability, you know, SEN things like that. So, they will struggle more with things like that, and they've said that the navigator spending that time with them, taking them out of the cells and things like that has really impacted well upon staff getting the right support at the right time" (Stakeholder 11).

"It's not only a benefit to the young person, it's a benefit to us, because they take a little bit of the pressure and the workload off the police. For example, they're liaising with the care homes or keeping the parents updated and also we often get cases where say a child in care has smashed up their care home or assaulted one of or numerous members of staff and they have flat out refused to have them back. So, prior to having the custody navigators, there was very little we could do. If a care home said, look, we're not having them back, we didn't have the training or experience or knowledge what to do with the children afterwards. So, it would be a lot of phone calls, bouncing around with inquiries with social services, what we're supposed to do with them. And the custody navigators have been able to bridge that gap for us, which has been a huge, huge help. They're explaining the law to them, and their responsibilities, which, they know parts of the children in care laws and regulations, which we don't do, we don't deal with that" (Stakeholder 10).

### 3.4.3. Community level: "Changing perceptions"

At community level, emerging outcomes centred on the potential for breaking the cycle of intergenerational engagement in crime. Stakeholders felt that this would be possible as navigators continue their engagement with children in the community and using a whole family approach.

“And I'd probably say so specifically with families that maybe have, you know, more than one child that's come through the criminal justice system who, you know, older brother is currently in prison and younger brother is now coming through the system because that's what his older brother did, and they couldn't stop the older brother and there was no support in place for that at that point, but younger brother has now come in and now [navigators] have turned up at their house and gone “right. I'm here to help”. It's a different experience” (Stakeholder 6).

The changing perceptions about police and services such as social care by families, witnessed by the navigators themselves, speak volumes in terms of the potential long-term impact of the programme. A good example is shown below where a family with previous social care involvement were cautious about engaging with navigators at first, but they later engaged:

“Now I'm also seeing more like families re-engage. We reengaged with a family yesterday because there's a lot going on in that family. They've had children removed in a short space of time. Mum didn't want to engage with anyone and neither did any of the family, but they're now engaging on a child in need plan. That's massive. It's massive for the families who we are working with, and who don't want anyone near them. So, I think it's that trust and that openness” (Stakeholder 2).

### 3.5. Improvements and Sustainability

#### 3.5.1. Service level enhancements: “We're going to help”

Some enhancements going forward were discussed in all interviews. First, it was suggested by some parents who came to the custody suite after their child was arrested, noting it was a very difficult and stressful time for them. They suggested that better visibility and a website dedicated to the custody navigators outlining their role would be beneficial.

“If it's new to you and everything's just coming up a million miles an hour, it's just identifying maybe her role. It might just be that initial because everything is going on, you're just getting given contacts, and you don't know what to do if I'm honest” (Parent 2).

“I went looking myself to try and find that information, because she obviously had that initial contact with [name] because he was there at the custody suite with [name] initially. So, to me, it was a case of, well, who is she? What is she going to do? What, you know, and as much as she explained it verbally I think, yeah, potentially an e-mail or a handout to turn around and go, you're under this programme now and this is here, this is what we're going to influence, this is what we're going to help” (Parent 1).

Stakeholders who work in Copy Lane custody suite discussed the shift patterns and working hours of the custody navigators. This has changed over the course of the pilot from a 9am-5pm system to an alternate shifts system i.e. one navigator works 9am-5pm Monday to Friday and the other navigator works 7am-7pm, and they switch shifts each alternate week meaning that there is a navigator present between 9am-7pm each weekday. However, given the nature of their work and limited time resources, some staff felt they were never sure if navigators were in or due in on any given day and that a visible timetable would be beneficial. Furthermore, suggestions of having custody navigators work late into the night and at weekends were also discussed. Currently, navigators use police systems to track any children who were arrested in the evening or at weekends when they are not working and offer them support within the community. However, these children miss out on valuable support in a time of crisis whilst in the custody suite.

“Monday to Friday, obviously, kids more likely to get arrested on a weekend. Also, kids are more likely to get arrested on an evening rather than a day. So, a slight change in shifts would be beneficial ... it would be useful to know who's on and their shift pattern, because there are days where we'd go and there'd be no one there because, for example, they may be out with the kids. So, it would just be useful if there was a sign on the door with their timetable that they're in” (Stakeholder 10).

Access to social care and police systems such as LCS (formerly Liquidlogic)<sup>10</sup> or NICHE<sup>11</sup> was a barrier at the beginning of the pilot. However, custody navigators now have access to these and youth justice system ChildView (exclusive to Sefton only). NICHE supports custody navigators to get in touch with families which they can now do in a timelier manner. NICHE also helps navigators to get updates on the children they have engaged with in custody. LCS and ChildView assists navigators to obtain contact details for families if police do not have them and provides information on whether the child is engaged with services so they can quickly make contact with the right professionals. Navigators report added benefits to accessing NICHE in that they can now also support a family to get in touch with the child's senior investigating officer, and they can also check and remind families of bail conditions and upcoming important dates related to this. One stakeholder felt that not having sufficient access to systems would continue to be a barrier, but they have overcome a lot of this with the support of the police.

“I did have concerns initially about whether, whether, you know, we'd be keeping children in longer because of the process. And that was one of my questions that I asked to them. And it was the opposite. So, because they've got access to Liquid Logic, they were, they said we're fully ingrained in the process, and we've been helping out” (Stakeholder 12).

However, there was some mention of issues with local authority systems and how they differ from place to place and not all are accessible for the custody navigators.

“There's all these challenges, aren't there, around the systems, so being able to use the different authority systems. I think we need to get, we need to get better at that. I think there's still challenges there ... the technology has to catch up with what we're doing so they need they need better access to systems. So, so definitely that as well” (Stakeholder 7).

### 3.5.2. Improve community engagement: “Something we can build upon”

There were discussions in the interviews about how well the navigator programme works with other services. Overall, this was very positive, however, there was some mention of potential changes that would reduce the potential for duplication of work. It was suggested by one stakeholder that this could be achieved with custody navigators sitting on child strategy meetings with these services having a specific role there within assessments and support planning, so that duplication of work is reduced and children's exit plans can be put in place accordingly with everyone on board.

“The community side of things, for me it's good, but I think it could be better ... it's the thinking about sort of exit strategies and duplication of work. So if there's a young child that's been arrested, they've been referred to the youth justice service, I feel it's that duplication sometimes of work that potentially the communication between the youth justice and navigators hasn't been great and I know that from working in the youth justice service, so that is my aim at the moment to try and steer the navigators to be a

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<sup>10</sup> Case management software for children's and adults' social care, often used by local authorities and in partnership with police for safeguarding.

<sup>11</sup> Police Records Management System

little bit more, you know, partnership working with these agencies ... it's something that we can build upon and look towards ...there's always improvement, isn't there? Nothing's ever perfect" (Stakeholder 11).

### 3.5.3. Children only suite: "Utopia"

The 'utopia' of custody navigators for all interviewed was to have a child-only custody suite, wherein children would not come into contact with adults who have been arrested "perfect scenario is having a custody suite that only children go to. They have a lovely group of navigators, mentors, liaison and diversion worker, youth justice service worker sat in the team, perfect, that would be ideal" (Stakeholder 11).

"The utopia is that they should have their own, children should have their own suite, so we should keep children and adults separate at all times, you know, and so if there is a way of doing that ... We have to work out a way of making sure that children just don't come into contact with adults ... You either have a separate young person suite, or you have a super suite that keeps them separate, so they never come into contact" (Stakeholder 7).

However, it was felt that the best situation currently would be to utilise the existing custody suites in Merseyside and to employ more navigators to cater for this. Given that there are currently two navigators in one custody suite who are already stretched within their work, and as noted in the quote below, resulting in missed opportunities; further extending the custody navigators to other suites is critical to the continued success of the programme.

"I'd probably say using the other, the other custody suites as well, because there's a lot of missed opportunities that we're facing. So, it's having a satellite version of the of the same project ... the only way we're going to overcome those challenges to quickly work with children, is getting a navigator in each local authority. And that navigator deals with those children for that local authority. And I feel like then one person is trained in that process. Whereas you're constantly running on your feet and trying... And then the catchment then will be a lot easier. So, your caseload would be identified within your area. So, it'd be like five navigators. We've got two" (Stakeholder 2).

It was also discussed in the interviews that there are other settings where navigators would be beneficial. First, court navigators have been suggested by some stakeholder as being a place where they would be beneficial to children. Furthermore, it was suggested that children who receive the option to attend the police suite for a voluntary interview/attendance (VA) at a suitable time rather than being arrested, may also benefit from navigator intervention either in the community or whilst at their VA. They currently do not receive an offer of support from custody navigators unless they come into custody via an arrest.

"The real need is the VAs. So, the children who don't even come to custody and who get dealt with in the community. These are being missed off every radar and that will be the early intervention to custody navigators. So, that's the branch that we need to be focusing on really in the next year ... what a lot of police forces are doing now, especially with children, is dealing with them in the community. When they do that, it is called a 'VA', which means voluntary interview or voluntary attendance. So, they come in for an interview that is ran completely by a separate team, but referrals-wise and support for that family or that child can be months after until it gets to YJS. So that's the real need. And that's where the early intervention for custody navigators could branch into then. Because people who were working on the VAs could then pass those details on and the

custody passports could then be started from the VAs' point and then they've got them" (Stakeholder 2).

#### 3.5.4. Measuring Impact: "Are they stronger?"

This final section pertains to discussions regarding how to best measure the impact of the custody navigator programme going forward. The most discussed measure was to track if a child is arrested, receives navigator support to completion; do they then get arrested again. Whilst this was seen as a good measure of impact, some noted that there are some other caveats to measuring the success of the programme in this way which would require careful consideration going forward and would require police data analyst support.

"Has that young person tracked them over a 6, 12-month period? Have they come back within to the custody suite? Have they committed other offences or intel that they're committing further offences? ... when they're at the end of the intervention have they felt it's gone? Do they feel like it's only had the impact on their life? So, I think, you know, making sure that we're gathering that feedback. If they did get arrested again, was it for a lesser offence? ... they may have come in for a possession of a knife or was it a low level, low gravity offence that they came back for, which is not a perfect success, but it's slightly more successful than it was, they're not coming back for another knife" (Stakeholder 11).

How a child acts within the custody suite on re-arrest was also suggested as a secondary measure for the success or failure of the intervention or support received e.g. if they are more aware of the procedures in place, if they are less frightened. This could be included as a potential intermediary or long-term measure of impact in future evaluations.

"I think there's two things, aren't there? There's the monitoring data, there's the actual statistics and what they demonstrate, but it's the bigger picture stuff ... How do you measure that that kid who had that intervention didn't come back into custody? But if they do come back into custody ... is it failure ... or are they stronger? Are they more resilient? Do they know how to ask for advice and help more? So even if they do come back in, that's not necessarily a failure. They were always going to come back in, but they are more able to cope with it. They know how to get help ... even if you've got a failure because they've come back into custody and again and again and again, actually, it doesn't mean that, - trust and confidence, you know, is possibly a way of, you know, does that, what do you think of the police? What do you think of the system? Do you recognise that you've, you know, been given additional support? How has it helped you?" (Stakeholder 7).

"Obviously the number of times that they get arrested, the number of times that police are called to their home address, whether it be like their parents' address or whether it to be their care home address, also the number of times that they go missing. So those three factors, I would say, were probably the best ones to measure the success rate.

And also, how often they would engage with the custody navigators outside of the custody environment" (Stakeholder 10).

Qualitative data collection and the voice of the child and their families was also noted as being another way to measure impact. Whilst that was included in this evaluation, the numbers were low which is often the nature of pilot programme evaluations, thus, going forward it would be beneficial to continue to try and engage with children and their family to present more qualitative findings and case studies in any future evaluations.

“Having conversations with those families, like the qualitative side of things, and, you know, seeing what impact there has been. I always say that every interaction is an intervention, and sometimes it could be just one conversation that changes someone’s mind or their perception ... tracking those families that are being worked with and seeing where they are at different points, you know, 12 months, 24 months, stuff like that, a gradual approach” (Stakeholder 2).

### 3.6. Case Studies

The case studies below represent five children who were supported by the navigators and their journey through this. As aforementioned, our evidence of impact at this stage is limited but some preliminary positive outcomes are highlighted in each case. The names provided for each case are pseudonyms and not reflective of the child’s real name. All quotes provided in each case study come from the case study interviews with custody navigators.

## Case Study 1: Stephen, 16

### Background

Arrested and brought to a different custody suite (not Copy Lane) therefore did not have Navigator support on that day.

Stephen dissociated and does not remember much about the arrest and procedures in the custody suite.

Living with Mum, Step-dad and siblings at the time.

Had a part-time job.

Whilst at strategy meeting YJS/custody navigator manager suggested Stephen be supported by navigators.

Stephen was bailed and moved in with other family members.

### Challenges

Enrolled in an educational course but had missed quite a lot.

Was not allowed to re-enrol at beginning of term following arrest due to bail conditions.

Stephen was then living with grandparents but became isolated from friends due to distance and bail conditions.

Stephen began to exhibit poor emotional wellbeing and ill mental health symptoms.

Stephen was worried about going back to work.

### Navigator Support & Activities

Navigator support began by face-to-face meetings with Stephen to ensure his needs were being met and he was aware of any services available to him.

Navigators began by trying to get Stephen back to education by liaising with the school until they confirmed he could re-enrol in Sept 2026.

Navigators liaised with investigating Police Officer to ensure Stephen and his family were informed of any update in the case.

Navigators supported Stephen's Grandparents by explaining procedures with answering bail and bail conditions, so they were fully informed.

### Emerging Outcomes

Stephen is now back in education.

Stephen is socialising with friend group again.

Stephen's mental health and emotional wellbeing has improved.

Stephen has good relationships with family.

Stephen is now back working at his part-time job.



"He's being a teenage boy again"

"He's seeing his mates again. He's getting back into normality"

"We really need an answer, this is his future, his mental health, this child needs some sort of stability"



"Obviously it's been a really traumatic time for him ... going out for the first initial visit a lot of it was just explaining what had happened, because I think they [family] were quite confused ... it's been a support for them as well"

## Case Study 2: Shaun, 12

### Background

Arrested and brought to Copy Lane.

Mum attended.

Shaun was very dysregulated in the custody suite.

Accepted navigator support which began in the custody suite that day.

Lives with Mum, Step-Dad and siblings.

Shaun had an SEN inclusion worker and an EHCP at the time.



"He's one of the youngest ones we've had in"

### Challenges

Shaun's education was interrupted as he was transferred to another school.

Shaun's education was then moved to online provision from home.

At the time of his arrest, Shaun was not enrolled in any education.

Mum tried to get Shaun back to school but they were only offered a reduced timetable option which would be 1 hour at the end of the school day.

"He hasn't been in education ... his education was moved ... transferred to online provision"



"We basically got him boxing, 3 nights a week ... he's not allowed in town centre under his bail conditions ... I had to ring his investigating officer"

### Navigator Support & Activities

Navigators supported Shaun's Mum by helping her to understand the EHCP and liaising with the SEN inclusion worker regarding the EHCP details.

Navigators liaised with specialised education provision to try and secure Shaun a place.

Navigators sourced a boxing gym for Shaun to attend 3 nights a week to reduce the chances of him engaging in risky behaviours. This included liaising with the investigating Police Officer to ensure he was adhering to bail conditions by attending this.

### Emerging Outcomes

Shaun has now been referred to Youth Offending Team who will continue to work with him.

Navigators are still in touch with Shaun's Mum to provide her with any support she may need.

Navigators hope that Shaun will be back in education in the near future but at the time of this case study interview, he had still not found a suitable educational provision.

Shaun is continuing to attend boxing classes.

## Case Study 3: Jodie, 15

### Background

Jodie was arrested and brought to Copy Lane where she received Navigator support.

Jodie had been arrested previously but brought to a different custody suite.

She reported previous self-harm and mental health problems.

Lives with Mum and siblings.

Jodie was extremely dysregulated at the time of her arrest.

She requested to speak to a mental health worker whilst in custody.

Jodie had a Youth Offending Team worker at the time of her arrest.

When she was ready to be released no parent was available to collect her, a friend's Dad picked her up, highlighting the limited support around Jodie at the time.

When the Navigator was saying goodbye, Jodie asked her for a hug.

### Challenges

Jodie reported a good relationship with her siblings but a strained one with Mum due to her having mental health problems.

Jodie noted that Dad visits sometimes.

Jodie also noted that her Dad has some mental health problems.

Jodie has caring responsibilities for her younger brother at times.

She has not been in formal education for some time.

### Navigator Support & Activities

Navigators supported Jodie in custody and got her to a calm regulated state.

Navigators arranged to meet with Jodie following her release from the custody suite to support her where needed.

Navigators have liaised with education provisions to discuss Jodie returning to her education and to try ease that transition for her.

### Emerging Outcomes

Navigators continue to give Jodie emotional support through one-to-one meetings.

Jodie is now back in education.

Navigators are continuing to support her career development plans by liaising with potential apprenticeships on her behalf, including hairdressing opportunities.

Jodie has not been arrested again.



"She was shouting and screaming ... I said you're too dysregulated, you're going to be here longer ... so just try and focus on me for a minute and let's just talk"

"I saw her for her initial visit she's really really struggling with everything ... she's got a lot on her shoulders "

## Case Study 4: James, 14

### Background

James was arrested and brought to Copy Lane with two co-conspirators who were older than him.

James has some physical disabilities.

He has also got ASD and ADHD.

James has an EHCP.

James was not known to services at this time.

James engaged with navigators very well at the custody suite.

### Challenges

James had been in education for 4 years and the previous one was an alternative provision.

Mum has mental health issues and experience of domestic abuse.

James' Dad had passed away.

Mum has a probation worker.

The family has been homeless for 4 years and living in temporary accommodation.

James had not been in education for 4 years.

### Navigator Support & Activities

Navigators place a CAMHS referral in place on the day of his arrest due to past trauma that he discussed.

Navigators put whole-family support in place.

Navigators worked to update James' EHCP which had not been reviewed in 3 years.

Navigators found that James liked rapping and boxing and tried to locate places for him to engage in these.

Navigators fought to get a strategy meeting\* in place to support this family.

### Emerging Outcomes

James is now on a Child in Need plan.

Mum is still in touch with Navigators, and she informed them that James was arrested again and brought to another custody suite.

James has been referred to Operation Inclusion.

James is now engaged on a boxing club with support from Navigators.

James has not been arrested since May 2025.

The support for James and his family is still ongoing.



"You are working with the family and not just the child ... it's someone's rights to have things in place ... she still deserves the basic rights and she's not getting it ... I will probably remember this case for the rest of my life"



\* a multi-agency, professional-only discussion held when a child is suspected of suffering or risking significant harm

## Case Study 5: David, 15

### Background

David was arrested and brought to Copy Lane where he received Navigator support.

David was being home schooled and had been out of formal education for 3 years at the time of his arrest.

The family had a history of social care support.

David received a curfew from 7am to 7pm following his arrest and bail conditions.

David has an interest in bikes and mechanics and is skilled in this area.

### Challenges

David displayed ASD and ADHD traits whilst in custody.

David struggled to understand what had happened on the day of his arrest.

David struggled with the noise in the custody suite.

The family did not have trust in services due to past experiences with social care.

### Navigator Support & Activities

The Navigators primary aim was to get David back into formal education.

Navigators were able to build trust with the family and continued to support them for 6 months.

Navigators worked with David to help him identify potential gang/grooming behaviours and risky situations.

### Emerging Outcomes

David is now in college, and the Navigators were there to support him on his first day of attendance.

David has had his ADHD diagnosis.

David is now able to identify risky situations and people and discusses this with Navigators.



"He was saying people in his life who he knew was negative for him"

"He started opening up a lot more about time in custody and how all the noises he heard and stuff like that"

"I just don't want him to come in again ... I don't want him to because he is so talented with mechanics, like so talented, but I don't think he's ever been given that encouragement"



## 4. Learning from the Evaluation

This report summarises the evidence for an evaluation of the custody navigator programme at Copy Lane Custody Suite between April 2025 and April 2026. The aim of this evaluation was to conduct a feasibility and pilot study of the custody navigators. The evaluation used 1) qualitative interviews with stakeholders, children, and parents; and 2) quantitative analysis of programme monitoring data to inform the findings. The feasibility and pilot study was implemented in two complementary phases each addressing several research questions. A summary of the evaluation findings in response to these questions is outlined below.

### 4.1. Summary of the feasibility of implementation study

#### *Can the programme be delivered as planned (fidelity)?*

In the first 12 months of the evaluation, the custody navigator programme kept fidelity to the proposed model in terms of providing initial engagement and support to 102 children whilst in the custody suite and subsequently engaging 36 children in further support and diverting them away from the criminal justice system for the period of time they were engaged with them. Navigators also kept to fidelity by supporting children in custody in a time of crisis and provided signposting to relevant services such as care homes, schools, and colleges.

Originally, it was intended that there would be 2-3 full-time custody navigators in post, however this was never reached. Between April 2025 and end July 2025 there was only one navigator in post until a second navigator was employed in August 2025.

A minor adaption has been made to the hours navigators work. The intended hours of work were between 9am-5pm Monday to Friday, but they now work alternate shifts - one navigator works 9am-5pm Monday to Friday and the other navigator works 7am-7pm, and they switch shifts each alternate week meaning that there is a navigator present between 9am-7pm each weekday.

#### *Does the programme implementation plan need refining?*

As there are currently only two full-time navigators in post, going forward there is a need for one more to keep to fidelity of the original proposed model. Additionally, having navigators working later in the evening and at weekends to capture all children entering the custody suite would be an improvement on the current implementation plan.

Parents expressed a need for a dedicated website for custody navigators which explains who navigators are, what they do in custody suite and as part of the follow-up support offer. Alternatively, printed leaflets with all required information for children and parents could be developed so that they can take this away and read later when stress and anxiety levels have lessened.

#### *How much of the programme is received by children (dose)?*

Between 8th April 2025 to 5th March 2026, 132 children were recorded on the custody navigators monitoring data and 102 (83%) of those children were seen by custody navigators. This demonstrates that 17% of children were not seen by custody navigators which was due to the navigators being unavailable, the young person being considered too high risk, or due to other specific circumstances in custody that meant it would not be possible or appropriate for the navigators to engage with that child. Typical custody engagement includes a navigator meeting with the child in a cell or the breakout room to complete initial screening and to determine the child's immediate needs. This could include a mental health assessment with one of the L&D team, tools for dysregulation, food, calling a parent or guardian, or other services. These are flexible however and based upon each child's needs at the time.

In terms of follow-up support, only half ( $n=62$ ) of the children in custody consented to this, and only  $n=36$  actually engaged in the follow-up support offered. Follow-up support is also dynamic and based on each individual child's needs but often begins with a follow-up phone call, a family home visit, or a face-to-face meeting in the community with the child.

### *What factors support or impede programme delivery?*

The implementation of the custody navigators programme was supported by a number of factors. Overall, acceptability of the programme by Merseyside Police, both in senior roles and those within the custody suite, was a major supportive factor for the implementation of the programme. That police in the custody suite feel the navigators also support their work ("make their life easier"), which has had a major positive impact on the working relationships within Copy Lane. The multi-agency partnership working within the custody suite between youth justice, police, L&D, and the custody navigators supported the implementation and delivery of the programme to work as well as it did in the pilot phase.

The dedicated space in the breakout room and adaptations to the custody cells also supported programme delivery.

Overall, the evaluation shows that there were some impeding factors along the way, but they have been overcome mostly. At first, onboarding the custody navigators to local authority and police systems (e.g. Liquid Logic, NICHE) was challenging and delayed. This was compounded by the fact that in the first three months, there was only one navigator in post when the original proposal was to have three. Navigators now have access to these systems. It has been highlighted that due to the nature of the programme, the navigators see children from different local authorities and each one has different policies and procedures in place which makes it challenging for navigators who may need support or to contact someone in these local authorities so they can appropriately signpost a child. This is still something that needs to be resolved.

### *What are children and practitioner's views and experiences of the programme?*

Overall, the evaluation shows acceptability and positive experiences of the programme by children, parents, and stakeholders. Key positive experiences related to the navigators ability to build trusting, supportive relationships with children and their families. Navigators are also adept at building strong working relationships with other stakeholders involved and with other supporting services and practitioners. Parents of children who had received navigator support in custody reported observing positive changes and outcomes in their child following the intervention. One less positive view from some parents was the lack of a website dedicated to the custody navigators, outlining their specific role and the offer of support. Children felt that the navigator programme has supported them particularly during the time when they are under bail conditions following their arrest and this has kept many of them from being arrested again and for some, back in education and a supportive routine.

## 4.2. Summary of the pilot study

### *What is the feasibility of measuring impact at an individual and service level?*

Currently, there is no data that is recorded by the navigators that enables evaluation of the impact of their work undertaken. Going forward, the monitoring data tracker will need refinements to enable future evaluations to measure impact. These are outlined below and if included, should be able to measure impact in a subsequent evaluation.

### *Does the programme achieve its intended outcomes during the pilot period?*

The qualitative findings demonstrate some emerging evidence of positive impacts; however, these could not be measured quantitatively. For example, it was intended to collect secondary outcome data using the Rosenberg 10-item self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1979) to gain insight into how children feel

about themselves through self-worth, social interactions, and motivations. However, it was not feasible for the navigators to collect this data during the pilot phase due to time constraints as there was only one navigator in post for the first three months of the programme and a lot of time was taken up with onboarding systems, familiarising with local authority procedures and policies.

The primary aim of the custody navigators programme in Copy Lane was to divert children away from the criminal justice system, specifically, violent crime. The main intended role of the navigators was to provide children with support in a time of crisis and to identify their needs to develop a plan of support. This support would include providing information and signposting to appropriate services such as education; training; drugs and alcohol services; employment; accommodation; and financial advice. The evaluation demonstrates that the navigators are working towards achieving these intended outcomes currently.

### *What are the emerging mechanisms of change, for whom and why?*

That the police in Merseyside are trauma-informed trained police could be considered a mechanism for change. Further to this, the use of language around 'children' (replacing the word juvenile) first brought to light by the MVRP and now being put into practice by custody navigators is beginning to show cultural change within the police custody environment. Navigators report this change in language by custody police helps children stay calm, regulate and are more likely to engage with both police and navigators. Critically, the top-down support from Merseyside Police for the custody navigator programme is central to embed this type of change in the future.

Another mechanism for change is how the navigators build trusting relationships with children which was believed to be due to them having youth worker and teaching background, and not police officers, providing a relational approach to the child's support.

## 4.3. Recommendations

A number of recommendations have been developed from the findings of this evaluation.

### 4.3.1. Service-Level

- A standard outcomes framework and monitoring data tracker sheet should be developed before rolling out to other custody suite. This will support future evaluations.
- There should be three navigators in post at Copy Lane custody suite to support the intervention to run to fidelity of the original model.
- Currently, navigators work alternate shifts - one navigator works 9am-5pm Monday to Friday and the other navigator works 7am-7pm, and they switch shifts each alternate week meaning that there is a navigator present between 9am-7pm each weekday. However, navigators could work evenings and weekends to increase engagement with all children within the custody suite whilst in a time of crisis. This will likely be feasible if a third navigator is employed. This will also likely improve the dose and reach of the programme, which could be measured at a future evaluation.
- Navigators can use police systems to track any children who were arrested in the evening or at weekends when they are not working and follow-up with them to offer support within the community. However, this is inconsistent and dependent upon time and availability of navigators. Going forward this could be strengthened and embedded into their weekly work schedule.
- Custody navigators should be present in all suites in Merseyside to ensure there are no missed opportunities for children who have been arrested. This model could be replicated across all suites, and the current navigators could lead this training and development.

- Long-term, consideration should be given to a child-only custody suite for Merseyside. This would be a bespoke suite which would include a team of navigators, and practitioners including mental health, substance use, youth justice and police.
- The navigator steering group need to consider ways in which to overcome the issues with local authorities having different procedures and policies in place for children who are being supported by navigators. This could be in the form of a workshop to bring together stakeholders from all agencies involved to discuss current procedures and guidelines, barriers for custody navigators and children they are supporting, suggestions on how to overcome these, and how this will benefit navigators, all agencies, and children and their families.
- A dedicated website for custody navigators should be developed and regularly updated to reflect their model of support. Alternatively, printed leaflets with all required information for children and parents could be developed so that they can take this away and read later when stress and anxiety levels have lessened.

#### 4.3.2. Programme monitoring and evaluation

- Currently there is no data that is recorded by the navigators that enables evaluation of the impact of their work to be undertaken. Therefore, the navigators should consider collecting and recording data that evidences the distance travelled of children they engage with. This could include collecting data with a young person pre (i.e. in the custody setting) and post (e.g. at an intervention end point/predetermined time period) their engagement with the navigators, detailing their self-assessed levels of need across several domains (e.g. emotional wellbeing, family and peer relationships, substance use, education, decision making and behaviours, feelings of safety). This may also help children to discuss needs they may have with the navigators and could assist the navigators in terms of tailoring the support they provide (both in custody and in the community). This type of data collected in the custody environment could be analysed to provide a description of the different types of needs which children in custody have. The feasibility of collecting this data should be assessed by the navigators and the steering group, including identification of any relevant validated tools which could be implemented subsequent piloting of such tools with young people by the navigators.
- The impact of the work of the navigators on children's offending outcomes could be measured by using the data tracker to record, with support from the police or MVRP, whether those who engage with the navigators go on to commit further offences at a fixed point in time (e.g. 3-months, 6-months, 12-months post engagement). The feasibility of recording this data, including allocation of this task to the most appropriate staff should be considered by the steering group.
- Further edits could be made to the data tracker to streamline the data recording process for the navigators and to better evidence the work they undertake with children. This may include creation of new variables, deletion of unnecessary variables, and ensuring that the data, if possible, is kept together within one spreadsheet.
  - Deletion of variables that are likely unnecessary in the context of the custody navigator programme and for future evaluations include: 1) Religion; 2) First language; 3) Outcome of arrest; and 4) If out of area what LA. Duplication of 1) Local authority; and 2) Wellbeing/FTA wellbeing should also be removed.
  - Addition of suggested variables are: 1) For those who engage in the community add 'open date' and 'closed date' variables; 2) Those who have actually engaged in the community; and 3) The length of time that those engaged in the community are supported for.
- We recommend collecting some data on pre- and post-navigator support outcomes. This will allow impact/distance travelled for children who engage with the support to be assessed i.e.

this is where they are in custody when arrested, before navigator support, and this is where they are after navigator support.

- The Outcome Star may be useful for this (this will incur a cost to purchase, and navigator training is required before they can have an individual license) as the child, with yourself, will score themselves from 0-10 (0 struggling, 10 not struggling) on a number of domains. This may be helpful in designing a child's support plan. There is a large variety of Outcome Stars available to suit different services and cohorts of service users.
- The Child and Youth Resilience Measure be useful for this (no cost to purchase). This includes 12 items measuring youth resilience levels scored on a 5-point scale (1 does not describe me at all, 5 describes me a lot).

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## 6. Appendices

### 6.1. Appendix 1: TIDierPHP Framework for Custody Navigator Programme

<b>TIDier-PHP Checklist: a reporting guideline for population health and policy interventions</b>	
<b>TIDier-PHP item</b>	<b>Item description</b>
1 Brief name	Custody Navigators within Copy Lane Custody Suite
2 Why	Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP), Youth Justice Service (YJS) and police identified a gap in provision for a Child First and Trauma Informed approach to children in police custody. Child First has developed from research into the impact on children in custody of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) which found the experience of being treated as an offender before a child to be distressing, punitive and damaging to children and young people's trust in police and the youth justice service. The Child First approach treats children in contact with YJS and police as children before offenders, empowering them to engage in the process, reducing the negative impacts of police and YJS contact and working towards positive outcomes. Navigators engage with willing children to guide them through the custody process and divert them away from future involvement in the YJS, specifically in relation to violent crime, using their professional skills and experience from working within the YJS.
3 What - materials	<p><b>Training for navigators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Safety training relevant to custody environment.</li> <li>• Information agreement for sharing of necessary data from police systems.</li> <li>• Instructions on completion of Screening form.</li> </ul> <p><b>Data capture &amp; evaluation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Custody navigator data tracker sheet:</b> completed once navigators are notified of the child arrival in custody. Collects information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Background info including crime reference.</li> <li>○ Childs demographic information.</li> <li>○ Childs background including interactions with other services.</li> <li>○ Childs entry into custody- offence type, experience in custody etc.</li> <li>○ Additional notes- Parent/Carer details, notes on interactions with the child.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>This is used to identify patterns, trends, and gaps in service provision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Custody navigator log:</b> records all interactions with navigators and children both in and post-custody. Captures initial conversation, 24hr follow-up call, wellbeing of the children, next steps for support and further engagement with navigators if the children agree to it, next steps/action plan including date of next session, plus notes section for any important information to be shared with the children local authority.</li> <li>• <b>Custody Passport:</b> records demographic data including local authority/area of residence, any additional needs, offence type, engagement including use of distraction toys, any potential support needed whilst in custody.</li> </ul> <p><b>Resources</b></p> <p>Physical resources available for the use by navigators at Copy Lane include a navigator breakout room in which to speak to the children after booking in, access to consultation rooms and medical room if needed.</p> <p>Distraction Packs are also made available to children in custody which include a ball, glow in the dark orb, suction worm toy, and chalk to be used on chalkboards in adapted 'child-friendly' cells.</p> <p>Cells also have a space-scape ceiling and digital clocks (Appendix 2).</p>

4 What and How	<p><b>Funding:</b> Custody navigators funded by MVRP via Sefton Council x2 full time positions.</p> <p><b>Eligibility:</b> All children aged 10-17 years old, entering police custody at Copy Lane police station who choose to engage with the navigators.</p> <p><b>Intervention:</b> Navigators will engage with all children entering custody, offering guidance and support including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing them information on support services which will meet their individual needs.</li> <li>• Support access to drugs &amp; alcohol services.</li> <li>• Signpost towards pathways into education, training, or employment.</li> <li>• Financial advice and support.</li> <li>• Support accessing accommodation services.</li> <li>• Signposting to family support services.</li> <li>• General support and guidance at time of crisis based on an assessment of individual needs, with an action plan going forward.</li> </ul>
5 Who provided	<p>The intervention was funded by MVRP, with custody navigators employed and managed by Sefton Council. Management of navigators is overseen by Amie Clarke, Operational manager for Sefton Youth Justice team, with MVRP lead Fleur Hann, Youth Justice (up to Sept 2025) and Superintendent Georgie Garvey, Merseyside Police (Sept 2025 – April 2026).</p> <p>Custody navigators have youth work and teaching background.</p>
6 Where	<p>Custody navigators will operate in the custody suite of Copy Lane Custody Suite in the Sefton ward of Bootle, North Liverpool. Navigators are available to any child entering police custody during their operational hours at Copy Lane regardless of their local authority area of residence.</p>
7 When and how often	<p>The intended hours of work were between 9am-5pm Monday to Friday, but custody navigators now work alternate shifts - one navigator works 9am-5pm Monday to Friday and the other navigator works 7am-7pm, and they switch shifts each alternate week, meaning that there is a navigator present between 9am-7pm each weekday.</p>
8.1 Planned variation	<p>N/A</p>
8.2 Unplanned variation	<p>A change in working hours/shifts was implemented to try and capture more children coming into custody and avoiding missed opportunities (see 7). Navigators can use police systems to track any children who were arrested in the evening or at weekends when they are not working and follow-up with them to offer support within the community. However, this is inconsistent and dependent upon time and availability of navigators.</p>
9.1 How well	<p>A change in working hours/shifts was implemented to try and capture more children coming into custody and avoiding missed opportunities.</p>
9.2 How well - delivery	<p>In the first 12 months of the evaluation, the custody navigator programme kept fidelity to the proposed model in terms of engaging children (n=102) and diverting them away from the criminal justice system for the period of time they were engaged with them. Navigators also kept to fidelity by supporting children in custody in a time of crisis and provided signposting to relevant services such as care homes, schools, and colleges.</p> <p>Originally, it was intended that there would be 2-3 full-time custody navigators in post, however this was never reached. Between April 2025 and end July 2025 there was only one navigator in post until a second navigator was employed in August 2025.</p>

## 6.2. Appendix 2: Images of Custody Suite

### *Breakout Room*



*Ceiling Space Scape and Digital Clock*



*Chalk Wall*



6.3. Appendix 3: Child Custody Passport



## Custody Passport

<b>Name:</b>	
<b>DOB/Age:</b>	
<b>Area residing:</b>	
<b>Local Authority:</b>	
<b>AA Options:</b>	
<b>Additional Professionals Connected to me:</b>	




<b>Important Information:</b>	
<b>Additional Needs/behaviours:</b>	

Offence	Entry Date	Entry Time

Engagement		
Date	Engagement	Distraction toy

<b>Potential Support needed:</b>

6.4. Appendix 4: Navigator Log

			
Full Name			
DOB			
Contact Details			
Custody Support Record			
Date	Time	Reason (intervention, communication, engagement)	Breakdown
Community Support Record			
Who do I live with?		Who is important to me	
Support Network		Current Positive activities	
What support we can help with			
Date	Time	Reason (intervention, communication, engagement)	Breakdown
Closure Summary			
Closure Date		Outcomes Achieved	

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