



## SUMMARY

Creative usage of Triangle Consulting's "Shooting Star" with children and young people considered at risk of becoming involved in Serious Youth Violence in Manchester.

## Manchester SAFE project (Support, Attend, Fulfil, Exceed)

### | Overview and history

The SAFE (Support, Attend, Fulfil, Exceed) Taskforce is a DfE funded project started in 2021. The overall aim of the project is to support vulnerable children at risk of becoming involved in Serious Youth Violence remain in school.

Manchester is one of ten taskforces in England who were chosen to take part in this project; the Manchester SAFE Taskforce started in April 2022 with the first mentors starting into schools in January 2023.

Manchester elected to focus on mentoring interventions, specifically children and young people transitioning between primary and secondary school settings. A strategic needs assessment was carried out to determine what "at risk of becoming involved in Serious Youth Violence" meant – such as young people with Adverse Childhood Events, low school attendance, Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs and / or children with an Education, Health and Care Plan, familial criminality and living in areas of high deprivation. Schools were split into Phases 1, 2, and 3, according to geographical location in relation to the number of serious youth violence incidents and arrests in the previous 18 months.

In-service benchmarking and progress tracking through the Shooting Star is a central part of the taskforce's approach, both in assessing the impact of the intervention on the young people and in helping practitioners with structuring their work with the children. The Shooting Star is also accompanied by three other information gathering mechanisms :



an emotional literacy questionnaire carried out at the start and end of the intervention – typically twelve months based on the Southampton questionnaire.

Smart Survey sessions records completed by the mentors after each contact with a mentee and essential in understanding and contextualising the progress seen in the Shooting Star.

Voice of the child qualitative light touch surveys carried out approximately three times per academic year where a SAFE Taskforce task member will speak to a small group of children and ask them what they enjoy about the mentoring, their relationship to the mentor and what they would like to see more of in their mentoring sessions .

Phase 1 started in January 2023 and involved the following six schools considered to be “high needs” school:

- East Manchester Academy
- Manchester Academy
- Manchester Communication Academy
- Manchester Enterprise Academy
- St Matthews
- Wright Robinson

Phase 2 started in April 2023 and involved the following eight schools considered to be “high needs” school:

- Our Lady’s
- Cedar Mount
- Dixons Brookland
- Dean’s Trust
- Coop Academy Manchester
- Coop Academy North
- The Barlow High School
- Abraham Moss

Phase 3 will start in January 2024 and will involve most schools across the city considered “middle to low needs”

## Overview

The SAFE Taskforce operates within a very multifaceted system balancing a wide range of different needs:

- The Department for Education which funds the programme
- Manchester City Council which needs to justify the investment of time and resources in this project, prove that the project is effective and look to the project’s sustainability over time.
- The schools’ need for quantitative data (which doesn’t particularly tell the story behind the child behaviour, needs and wants)



- The schools' need for compliance from children for the school to run smoothly which might ignore or suppress the children's own views and needs and;
- The mentors who need to balance the needs and wants of the schools, the taskforce while also supporting the children and their family.

It is a fairly complex, multi systemic context which doesn't always work together in a way that really works for the young person. Our aim in this programme has been to keep the young persons at the centre of everything and to really understand and respond to their perspective and needs.

It is notable that mentors have so far been incredibly adept at balancing those needs and requirements while doing outstanding work with the children and advocating for them. The Shooting Star was chosen as a way of structuring the work with young person and monitoring progress because we felt it was the best way of really listening to the voice of the young person.

**Do you use the language of 'Human Learning Systems' to describe your approach?  
If not, what other language do you use?**

The preferred term within the SAFE taskforce is "child-centred practice", primarily because it is widely use by all professionals within the sectors but also because it represents the ethos of both the mentoring practice and education at large. The aim of this project is to support the child in the most holistic way possible.

In an interview with one of the mentors (LW), she described child-centred practice as **"The need for differentiation for each child, acknowledging that each child is different and I work with that. I take what's important about the Shooting Star but adapt it so that the child feels comfortable answering"**

Another mentor (DE) during his interview, talked about the importance of the Shooting Star's action plan when working in a child-centred way. He described the action plan as " the best way to show children that all of their goals and aspiration, especially those that aren't concerned with the school, are worth working towards. It makes them feel like they aren't just pupils in a school, it's for them"



## | HLS Approach

### | Human

Describe what is 'Human' about how you work

#### **"ENABLE HUMAN FREEDOM AND FLOURISHING"**

SAFE mentoring intervention aims to nurture and empower the child in making positive decisions and choices with long-lasting impact – long after the initial mentoring intervention has finished, ideally. Using tools such as the Shooting Star allows mentors and children to explore topics important to the young person and work with them to give them the confidence they need and the tools to achieve their aspirations and make pro-social choices both in and out of school.

While the Star is used primarily to benefit the children, it also has benefits for:

- The mentors who feel there is a purpose and structure to their work and can quantify as well as qualify the progress of their mentees using the Star
- The schools who can evidence the effectiveness of the intervention to academy and governors board, as well as internally. Some schools have also noted a reduction in disruptive behaviour and an improvement in attendance.
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LW in her interview stated that "it's about emphasising the positive of the system to the child in terms of understanding themselves, track their progress and take ownership of their progress. Also it raises awareness of the support systems around them and de-stigmatises accessing help. It would be nice if everyone had time to reflect". LW also stated that she always tells her mentees: "This is you, this is about empowering you, getting the best for you"

However it is worth bearing in mind how complex the balancing act is for mentors in giving the children the central role their wants and needs deserve whilst at the same time working with what the school system requires of them. Again, the Shooting Star has been instrumental in supporting the "humans" in this context.

### | Learning

How have you enacted Learning as a management strategy ?

#### **Learning for mentors**

Learning in this context has been about introducing the Star to some mentors and mentoring companies who had not previously used it as well as reinforcing its uses to other companies as well as the schools' leadership teams.



The taskforce's policy is that each child should have a Shooting Star assessment every half term or so. This has been very helpful for the mentors in learning about the child's life, aspirations and challenges. It has also enabled them to co-create action plans with the child to be used as a starting point and provided some structure for the mentoring sessions. However, and linking back to the human element, this co-created action is not rigidly followed – it acts more as a guideline. As mentors forge a deeper bond with their mentees, they are able to adapt their sessions and approaches to new or resurgent issues the mentees come with and work through them.

During a workshop organised by the taskforce and facilitated by Triangle Consulting the SAFE mentors reported that they learnt so much about the children when using the Star because it helped structure the conversations.

### Learning for pupils

DE in his interview said “ the Star's good to know what to work on first. But more than that, it's really good for the kids to gain more self-awareness”

This increase in self learning was noted by other mentors during a SAFE Taskforce workshop early December. Mentors reported that the Star really helped young people feel listened to and valued and also gave them a chance and the space to think about themselves, who they are. This in turn enabled them to think about their reactions to certain events and how to change that behaviour.

### Learning for schools

The schools, while recognising the broad value of the Shooting Star, have been most focused on the 'Learning' and 'Communication' outcome domains of the Star and have not given much attention to other outcome domains such as 'Aspiration' and 'Confidence'. This has rendered their learning from the school side quite superficial. But they are not actively blocking the mentors from using the Star.

However, the above statement is very sweeping and generalistic. There have been pockets of good practice where the mentor and teachers worked together to both learn about the child and their needs while also supporting the child to remain in the classroom and engage with their learning.

Mentor SV worked with a young girl who kept being asked to leave the science laboratory and classroom. Using the Shooting Star revealed that the child wanted to be a nurse but couldn't follow the classroom instructions, “ the teacher's going too fast”. When she asked for help she was rebuffed by the teacher. A co-created action plan between SV and the child was put in place including having a meeting with the teacher to try and find a solution.

The meeting with the teacher was very fruitful as they learnt a lot about the child's aspirations and needs in the classroom. The teacher had not realised that the young girl needed help and had not thought of ways to support her. The teacher simply thought she was being disruptive to get out of class rather than being overwhelmed but it was clear the girl wanted to learn and progress.





he teacher, the mentor and the young girl put together an action plan based on the Shooting Star to help her stay in the classroom and learn including being told in advance what would be taught that day, allowing a two minute break away if she started to feel overwhelmed and could not self regulate within the classroom environment and being sat at the front of the class, closer to the teacher.

This worked very well, with the young girl remaining engaged throughout the school year and into the next - she is on track for an A\* in sciences, and a step closer to becoming a nurse.

## | Systems

### What is the 'system' that you have worked with/brought together?

The SAFE taskforce system brings together schools, mentoring companies and Manchester City Council to support the needs of vulnerable children across the city in a very child-centred way. Essentially it is attempting to bring three systems together, all three with very different ideas of what success looks like: Success for our young people is to be listened to, to feel safe, able to be completely themselves without judgement and feel like they can achieve something.

Success for our mentoring companies is to ensure children attend, see the children develop and engage, good case studies and measurable outcomes which is where the Shooting Star really comes into its own. Success for the DfE and Manchester City Council means that children attend school and engage both in classrooms and within the school community, attend and engage with their mentoring sessions, attain better grades at GCSE (their predicted grades or above), fewer children commit and are charged with Serious Youth Offences thus fewer children entering the justice system (Serious Youth offences are classed by the Ministry of Justice and the Youth Justice Board as Serious offences of a gravity score of 5 and above in Violence Against the Person, Robbery, Drugs and weapons possession).

Schools work very hard to balance their duty of care for the children in their charge, get good results, comply with OFSTED and relevant legislation and run efficiently. This can lead to tensions even within the schools and a focus on easy quantifiable wins and 'running a tight ship'; sometimes children's needs can be pushed to the background.

The children themselves operate in a set of systems, whether is familial, peer to peer, schools or extra-curricular activities. Those systems influence their behaviour. One mentor AP, mentioned one of his mentees "internal tension". The child felt in being caught between two sides of their family – the high achieving side where family members went onto further education and professional sporting careers while another side was well known to the authorities. This tension affected how the child behaved in school and their boundaries. Using mentoring and Shooting Star helped the child (with mentor support) navigate this tricky landscape and set their aspirations on a more positive path.

The mentors are seen as the bridge between all those systems and the child is the lynchpin of all those systems. Regular clinical supervisions in groups of 5 people maximum, an all mentors forum and Shooting Star workshops have enabled what was seemingly a very heterogenous group of mentors to come together to learn from each other and share best practice in all areas of their profession, not just Shooting Star.



There is an indication that the programme might be having a systemic impact, at least the start of a systemic change conversation. There are conversations within Manchester City Council about including a mentoring offer within schools to support children before they are moved to an Alternative Provision or, in more severe cases, the Pupil Referral Unit. There are also conversations starting to happen around using progress tools more widely within the schools and local children services.

The SAFE Taskforce use of the Shooting Star is, essentially, a pilot and currently yielding very interesting positive quantitative results as well as thought provoking and sometimes even challenging conversations. This is very positive as it challenges the local authority to rethink and reconsider what is considered progress and achievement in vulnerable children.

## | Governance/Accountability

**How is this work being governed? How have your governance or accountability processes changed to work in a Human Learning Systems way?**

The data doesn't always drive the learning. It's the human.

The SAFE Taskforce consciously chose to use mixed methodology to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the project in order to foreground the human aspect. It gives a lot of importance and focus to the qualitative elements and the voice of the child to showcase/highlight the small wins, internal changes within the child, how they navigate those conflicting systems they are part of and where they can impact the systems by making positive choices.

The taskforce collects the notes from the Shooting Star, as well as all contact notes from every group and individual sessions and a viva voce semi-structured interview with groups and individual children. This creates a rich tapestry.

The taskforce monitors the monthly completion and submission of behaviour points, smart surveys, and Shooting Star readings to monitor the work of the mentoring companies. The Shooting Star portal also supports both mentoring companies and young people in keeping track of action plans and progress.

The taskforce is comprised of a Project Lead with strategic oversight and responsibility for sustainability of the project. A Research and Data Lead with both strategic and operational responsibility for the evaluation and performance management of the project, a Business Lead who leads on operational and administrative aspects of the project and, finally, a Commissioning Lead who deals with our supplier relationships and contractual work.

The taskforce reports to the Director for Children Services, the Director for Education and the Head of Performance Research and Intelligence service. The taskforce reports into the Manchester Youth Justice Service, the Community Safety Partnership and the Manchester Inclusive Alternative Provision Strategy.



## | Story of Change

**How did you go about adopting an HLS approach? What was the spark for change? Where did you start? Who was involved?**

The Human Learning System approach is already woven into the fabric of all the systems within the SAFE project by working first and foremost in a fully child-centred manner. However, the SAFE taskforce has started to shift the conversation with other parts of the MCC and DfE systems from an emphasis on hard metrics and quantitative data to qualitative data and greater prominence of Voice of the Child and co-creation. The Shooting Star has been instrumental in this change. The taskforce promoted the use of the Star in various multi-disciplinary forums to all children, safeguarding and education colleagues. At the halfway point of the Phase 1 pilot, the taskforce produced an interim report using 80% qualitative data. This was to reinforce the importance of putting the child's voice, needs and wants at the heart of every conversation by using really effective and intuitive tools to structure the conversation and affect change in a sustainable way for the children and young people. Schools in particular understood this and have started to adopt this approach with children who are deemed vulnerable or those who become frequently dysregulated.

## | Barriers and Tensions

**How is this work being governed? How have your governance or accountability processes changed to work in a Human Learning Systems way?**

Early emphasis was placed on collecting data to demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention and showcase, in the form of case studies, all the excellent work by mentors and mentees within a school system. It has been recognised that there is certain administrative burden on the schools and mentors to gather all this information. Nevertheless it is also vital to the success of the pilot.

## | Enablers

**What were the factors/conditions which enabled you to adopt an HLS approach?**

Phil Hoyland, the previous Project Lead was a real enabler – he made it clear how important it is to see the child at the heart of the system and that what is important to them must therefore be important to the mentor. The mentors who work in a very child-centered way were also great advocates within the schools.





## |TopTips

**What are your 'top tips' that you think others might find interesting?**

One of the most useful tips came from LW who completely tailored her approach to the Shooting Star as well as other benchmarking tools used in the taskforce to each child, their learning preferences and energy levels. Her advice was to not be prescriptive and rigid, have a large toolkit of activities and teaching/learning methods as well as being patient and attuned to the child's energy levels and any potential familial or peer conflict that can affect their attitude.

## |Your artefacts

**What 'artefacts' have you created that help you to work in this way?**

There are no artefacts currently available, in terms of job descriptions and the Theory of Change and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment documents cannot be shared by request from the DfE.

However, pictures and videos from the HLS/Shooting Star mentors workshop can and will be shared.

## | What next?

Sustainability is our next challenge. We have been successful in putting the child at the centre of all the intersecting systems and supporting the child in navigating those systems through mentoring and the Shooting Star. We now need to keep the momentum going with schools, education professionals and social services professionals. We are planning a series of workshops and a 'champions' training to support this.

