

Case Study

MVP: An effective school and youth work partnership

Smithycroft Secondary School & St Paul's Youth Forum

1. Context

Since 2012, the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme has been a central strand of Education Scotland's efforts to support *Equally Safe*, Scotland's national strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls.

The collaboration between Smithycroft Secondary builds on more than 25 years of partnership with St. Paul's Youth Forum (SPYF). This trusted relationship began in 2000, when SPYF first delivered PSE in the school, bringing community methods into the classroom. The partnership was further strengthened in 2022 when a Pupil Support Teacher joined SPYF staff on a study visit to Iceland. A key learning from the visit was the concept of "youth houses" within schools—dedicated youth spaces staffed by youth workers during school days. This reinforced the value of embedding community youth work into school life and inspired new thinking for the Smithycroft–SPYF partnership.

Once SPYF staff were trained in MVP, the partnership could deliver additional scenarios such as *Party* and *Expectations*, which require adult facilitators. This has enabled a fuller, more consistent rollout of MVP while sustaining the trust and mutual respect built over decades.

MVP provides a powerful method for bringing formal and informal pedagogies together. While many prevention initiatives offer only short-term benefits, MVP is embedded and sustained. When delivered jointly by school staff and youth workers, it reshapes how young people understand violence, influences peer cultures, and positively impacts the ethos of both school and community.

2. Why This Collaboration Matters

Research confirms and young people tell us clearly: they need support to navigate the realities of healthy relationships, consent, and respect in a world saturated with sexualised content, harmful gender norms, and social pressures linked to alcohol, pornography, and violence.

By combining Smithycroft's role as a formal education provider with SPYF's award-winning expertise in community-based youth work, we created safe, trusted, and relational spaces in which young people could engage more openly. Teachers knowledge of the curriculum and MVP implementation, along with the informal approach of youth workers, allowed pupils to confidently explore difficult topics in a way that felt both credible and comfortable.

The MVP framework provides a shared language and structure for these discussions, enabling young people and staff to address complex issues such as rape, consent, gender expectations, the normalisation of pornography, and the role of alcohol in risky situations. Crucially, these conversations were trauma-informed, age-appropriate, and responsive to the realities of young people's lives.

3. Aims of the collaboration

The collaboration between Smithycroft and SPYF set out with a clear ambition: to strengthen approaches to the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) by embedding MVP across both school and community settings. Together, we aimed to foster conversations that would not have been possible in isolation and to create a prevention model that extends beyond individual lessons to become part of a whole-community approach.

A central aim was to empower young people as leaders, giving them the skills, knowledge, and confidence to challenge harmful norms and be active bystanders. By combining formal education with community youth work, the partnership sought to ensure that prevention messages were not only taught but also lived and reinforced across different settings.

Scotland's national priorities closely align with this collaboration. It contributes directly to *Equally Safe*, supports the *National Improvement Framework* by promoting health and wellbeing and developing skills for life and work, reflects the *National Youth Work Outcomes* by building confidence, resilience and communication, and upholds the principles of the *UNCRC*, ensuring that young people's voices are heard and respected.

From SPYF's perspective, this partnership has allowed us to achieve outcomes that would not have been possible alone. On our own, we could not have embedded MVP within the formal curriculum, and the school could not have facilitated the same depth of discussion on issues like pornography, alcohol and consent. Together, we have been able to create a model that is both sustainable and transformative, giving young people the tools to look after themselves and one another.

Looking ahead, the next steps will be to expand this collaborative model, ensuring it continues to grow, reach more pupils, and embed MVP as both a school and community resource.

4. Approach / Implementation

The collaboration was grounded in joint training and a shared commitment to creating safe, open spaces for discussion. SPYF staff, were invited into Smithycroft to deliver *Expectations* and *Party* with S5 and S6 pupils. Teachers observed that this changed the classroom dynamic in which pupils engaged more openly, asked questions they might have held back in a traditional lesson, and described the sessions as 'different from a normal class'. This highlighted the value of involving trusted youth workers alongside school staff to explore issues that are often difficult to tackle in a formal classroom setting.

SPYF also facilitated the *Knife* scenario in the youth club. While not yet delivered in Smithycroft, the outcomes were comparable: young people spoke candidly about masculinity, peer pressure, and the risks of carrying weapons. These discussions showed that, whether the setting is a classroom or a youth space, MVP provides the structure and shared language to address pressing issues affecting young people's lives.

5. Impact / Outcomes

For teachers, this collaboration provided reassurance that challenging topics could be addressed in a way that was both safe and meaningful. Crucially, pupils recognised that these conversations were not being led by the same staff they see in school every day but by trusted adults with a degree of separation, a factor that gave them greater confidence to speak openly.

Perhaps the strongest impact has been in demonstrating that SPYF youth workers are well received by pupils within the school environment. This finding has helped to build confidence

among school staff and laid the foundations for a model of delivery that bridges formal education with community-based practice.

The wider outcomes echo those highlighted nationally in MVP research: pupils are not only learning about gender-based violence but are also gaining practical active bystander skills, from challenging sexist language to looking out for peers in risky situations. This positions MVP not just as a school programme but also as a shared prevention tool across the whole learning community.

6. Reflections

This collaboration has demonstrated that MVP can act as a bridge between school and community. When delivered jointly, the programme creates conditions for deeper, braver conversations that may not emerge in traditional lessons. It shows the value of combining the authority and reach of formal education with the trust and informality of youth work.

While the early results are promising, the process has also highlighted the importance of flexibility and co-design. Each partner brings unique strengths, and it is the balance of these that enables young people to feel heard, respected, and empowered to act.

7. Next Steps

Looking ahead, the partnership aims to expand MVP delivery across more year groups within Smithycroft, and SPYF will continue to support the recruitment and training of new cohorts of senior pupils as MVP mentors each year. *Party* and *Expectations* Scenarios will continue to be delivered in both school and community settings, ensuring that young people can engage with these topics in safe and trusted spaces. The partnership also intends to disseminate its knowledge via Education Scotland to facilitate potential replication in other authorities. SPYF has successfully secured funding from the National Lottery Fund to expand collaboration with parents, local feeder primary schools, and neighbouring communities, which will further strengthen the community-wide public health approach to violence prevention.

These future aims will allow scope for MVP to continue to evolve as both a school and community resource, helping to embed prevention in every part of young people's lives.