# Youth crime prevention – Mentors in violence protection – Transcript

***How does the VRU work with schools to prevent youth crime?***

**Karyn McCluskey, Director, Violence Reduction Unit:**We’ve always worked with schools and part of Medics Against Violence was we tried to get doctors to go into schools, because the police have always gone into schools and said: 'Don’t do that, you’ll go to jail.'

And so what we got was we got the doctors to go in and the doctors were talking about if you get a scar on your face, if you lose your teeth…they started to talk about personal consequences, and about well-being, and about confidence, and about keeping yourself healthy and safe.

Lots of young people had lots of misconceptions about violence. You know that they see the television and so, I mean, one of the young people had said: 'Well, where’s a safe place to get stabbed?' and one of the doctors was like: 'Right…' and he actually turned it round – he was really clever, I would never have done this, really cleverly he turned it round on them – and he said: 'Well, where do you think?' and they said: 'Well, the hand', and then he said: 'Well, no all these major arteries and veins come into the hand. And actually, if you get stabbed there, you could bleed to death in seven minutes.'

And they said: 'Well, the foot' and then he said: 'Well, no you’ve got the femoral artery that comes away down.' And so they started to talk about biology, it was absolutely fascinating. You know, seeing them think and then thinking actually there’s no safe place, you know that…really interesting work.

We work with Mentors in Violence Programme and obviously that’s a bystander programme. It’s designed to give kids the skills to challenge the norms in their own society about how people speak, sometimes about women, about violence, and giving them some of the tools to challenge.

But we let them come up with it themselves, you know: 'Well, how do you think you would deal with this?' And it’s probably, can I tell you, it’s the most extraordinary thing I’ve ever seen.

It was brought over from the American military by a guy called Jackson Katz and when we put it in, I don’t know what I thought it was going to be like but I’m always, you know that ‘Let’s give it a try’ and see if it fails, so what? At least we’ve tried to do something.

And then I went out and saw some kids, it’s running in Portobello and in Greenock, and can I tell you, I was utterly… I was gobsmacked. The kids were spectacular. I mean they were just… they ran it themselves, so the fifth years… you know, it’s peer mentoring so sixth years teach fifth years, teach fourth years, and the mentors were just extraordinary.

They had a level of skill about dealing with younger kids that I would never have. They intervened with the first years when they were getting bullied. They tried to support them. They created a really positive environment inside the school and it made me smile.

Honestly, the whole day I saw it, I came back and I thought that’s extraordinary. The teachers weren’t really… I mean they were part of it, they absolutely supported it but it was absolutely run by the pupils. The pupils created the norm within the school environment.

[End of transcript]