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Issue 5 - September 2022



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FIGHTING
KNIFE CRIME



Issue 5

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**MAKE
TIME
COUNT**
Today!



A Network of Networks

Foreword, Bruce Houlder, Founder of Fighting Knife Crime London (FKCL)

Despite all the amazing work done by individuals and by London community youth projects and all the political claims being made about violence reduction, London continues to see more and more people dying needlessly this summer. What FKCL offer is a central forum for new thought and discussion, and up-to-date information resources on how to change all young lives for the better.

We continue our tradition of serious discussion pieces this month with contributions from:

- **Lady Val Corbett**, Founder of The Corbett Network for Prisoner Reintegration
- **Patrick Green**, CEO of the Ben Kinsella Trust
- **Jonathan Ley**, Founder of Make Time Count
- **Keith Fraser**, Chair of the Youth Justice Board
- **Joe Raby**, Senior Operations Manager – Gangs and Violence Reduction Services, Catch-22
- **Mifta Choudhury**, CEO, Youth Ink Charity
- **Sir Stephen O'Brien**, Vice President of Business in the Community
- **David Apparicio MBE**, Magistrate, and CEO Chrysalis Programme
- **Eve Hamilton MBE**, CEO Key4Life charity
- **Joseph Duncan**, Director, Youth Futures, Winner 'Best Organisation for dealing with Youth Conflict'
- **Ben Eckett**, Co-founder Gloves not Gunz
- **Chris Daw QC**, Author 'Justice on Trial'
- **PLUS**, experiential contributions from **James, Liam, Melchi and Owen**, all young people who have found help through organisations such as those we feature in our magazine and directory.

This month we applaud the success of our active partner organisations, such as Rachael Box's Local Village Network, and their App which gives access to help for many thousands of young people in London, and the important support for mentoring they offer. When you add this to other organisations and projects offering similarly wide and active help to young people, to the additional resources of our own online presence, you have a powerful engine for real change. It is those thousands of people that are out there working for, and alongside, young people that we wish to champion - the mentors, the youth workers, and the active contributors to real change, in the Arts, in Sport, Education, in Business and in the field of Mental Health.

What we offer is for all those people, for young people in need, and for those that wish to work together to help. FKCL's Magazine is a serious collaborative contribution focussing much needed new thinking in this area in Greater London, bringing into one open forum, both online and on social media, the discussions that many of us are having behind closed doors. Add this to FKCL's central resource of reports, research and statistics from every sector that feeds into this debate, and you have an indispensable independent resource of public information. The contribution in this edition from Lady Val Corbett of the Corbett Network is just one strong demonstration of how FKCL is fast becoming the network of networks for those concerned with every aspect of youth empowerment, employment, and engagement, however seemingly remote that connection might at first seem. FKCL are extremely grateful

to her for putting together several important contributions to this edition of this magazine. We will work with anyone who wishes to expand cooperative contact towards the fullest possible engagement with young people in their futures.

We work every day to add to and improve our directory of organisations, and research each one carefully. If you wish to receive our magazine directly to your inbox as well as online, you need only fill in the short form [here](#). Remember too that we will also advertise your events and announcements relevant to our aims for **free here**.

Bruce Houlder
Founder of Fighting Knife
Crime London (FKCL)



www.fightingknife crime.london



Bruce Houlder

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LYNCHPIN
THEATRE

The UK premiere of the play *Apples In Winter* beautifully gives voice to the hidden victims of crime. Miriam's son has been on death row for 22 years. Today the state will execute him. As is the tradition, he is granted a last meal. He asks for his mother's apple pie. In this compelling and compassionate play Miriam shows us how to make the perfect pie as she grapples with what happened 22 years ago.

*"Powerfully gives voice to
mothers of offenders"*
A prison chaplain

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APPLES IN WINTER

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One Last Request
One Apple Pie*

by Jennifer Fawcett

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Directed by Claire Parker

Featuring
post-show
discussions

"This play has the potential to be a catalyst for change." A prison volunteer

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theplaygroundtheatre.london/events/apples-in-winter

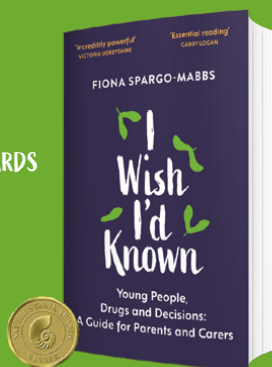
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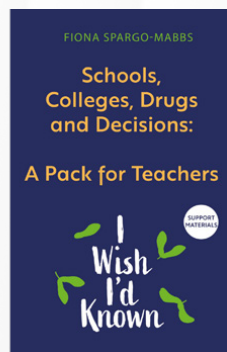
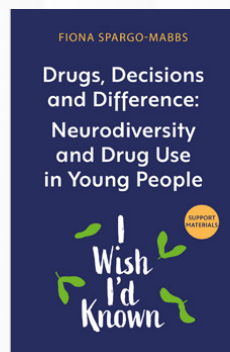
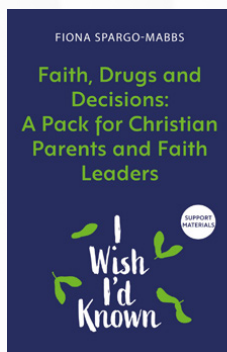


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parents of teenagers"
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Instead of sending you to Court, I'm sending you to get the help you need

Jonathan Ley, Founder, Make Time Count

The biggest potential change to Policing in a generation. Don't waste it, invest in it.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 has not been without controversy. Critics decry its assault on our basic right to protest. However, the Bill also contained a change which caused very little fanfare and has the potential to revolutionise the way low level and first time offenders are managed. If implemented successfully, it could radically reduce the current high levels of reoffending. Why isn't more being made of this?

The Bill updates the adult "Out of Court Disposals" (OOC) framework that deals with low level offending. While we see serious crimes reported on the news, in reality almost half of all Police positive outcomes are dealt with by these OOCs. Minor drug possession, shoplifting, assaults and neighbourly disputes; it's the stuff that doesn't make the news but takes up an enormous amount of Police time, upsets local residents and disrupts communities.

This change in legislation mandates that the Police understand why the person committed the crime. Based on this insight, the Police can then refer the offender to partners who will address their underlying needs. So if you were shoplifting to fund your drug habit, the Police may insist that you write a letter of apology to the shop owner, attend a

local drug support service and then an employability workshop to help find you a job.

This means that from your first interaction with the Police, they will involve community groups, charities and other organisations in your rehabilitation, building a network of people that are trying to help divert you from crime. Your own personal Pit Crew who will try to get you back on track. Surely this is more effective in reducing reoffending than sticking the person in a long queue to wait for a court slot that may or may not offer any better alternatives?

This change in focus is significant because almost 20% of people that receive a OOC will go on to reoffend, and may become involved in knife crime and gangs, a subject Fighting Knife Crime is trying to address.

It's also a fact that many offenders suffer from multiple complex needs. There isn't a convenient pill you can give to people to straighten them out. It is crucial we attempt to understand and address the root causes of crime from the very first interaction with the Police, as these needs are not tackled by being sent to court.

When sent to court for less severe "summary or either way" offences, 60% of adult offenders receive a fine. So it makes sense to give Police Officers the ability to issue a similar financial penalty

and then also prescribe local services that can help the offender address the root causes of their behaviour.

Reprioritising Police resources is the right thing to do and has significant operational benefits:

- Considers the victim's views
- Delivered swiftly
- Involves community experts
- Reduces court time used for minor offences.

Evidence suggests that, if executed successfully, diversionary programmes can have significant benefits.

- Reduce frequency and harm related to reoffending
- Increased victim satisfaction
- Simplicity and ease for Police
- Speed of Justice
- Improved public confidence
- Impact on reoffending rates.

Ultimately we can achieve a safer society with well thought out and executed diversionary programmes rather than court fines.

A focus on diversion from their first Police interaction may prevent people becoming habitual offenders. Even when they come back for the second or third visit. Should we continue to try community solutions before reverting to court? Evidence suggests that continuing community based interventions is no less successful than a court sanction.

Of course there is a catch. Doing this right takes time and effort, and the Bill acknowledges this.

It recognises that there is a significant additional process and admin burden on front line Policing, namely:

- Determining eligibility for OOCs
- Assessing individual need
- Matching need to a service provision

- Monitoring compliance
- Supporting users through reminders
- Dealing with breaches.

The evidence on what works is still scarce, and academic studies tend to be relatively small scale due to the difficulties in gathering data. Adopting this approach across England and Wales would enable us to be a world leader in rehabilitation insights and lead the world in reducing the scourge of reoffending.

However, the Bill also recognises that there is no additional resource in the form of officers or staff to manage these processes. The government estimates that the impact across England and Wales will be around £10m per year, the equivalent to one extra hour of Police time per OOC. Given the list of requirements above, one hour does seem rather optimistic - from our studies, we believe it will be significantly higher.

Without additional funding, Police are faced with unpleasant choices. Perhaps they pay lip service to the new legislation and implement this process badly, thus not getting the benefits of reduced reoffending. Alternatively they de-prioritise other important Police work, also not optimal.

Neither alternative is ideal. Beyond just funding, there are cultural issues. Interviewing front line Officers, we've received quizzical looks. "That's not my job", and "Is this not something for social services"? These are valid points. Is a Police Officer the right person to be having such discussions? Would I be receptive to receiving help from the same person that just arrested me or would I respond with mistrust? Are we asking the Police to deal with inadequacies of the family, schooling and other functions? Should we not employ specialists for this job?

The savings for the court system are

obviously huge. The savings to society are also significant given the reduction in reoffending. We need to support the Police to deliver savings to the wider criminal justice system and to society as a whole.

The government should see this change as an opportunity. An opportunity to meet so many other government goals. Address labour market shortages by supporting those involved in the criminal justice system back into work. Support levelling up by giving people access to employment. Being tougher on crime by addressing high rates of reoffending. This isn't a soft touch and should not be seen as such. Insisting that an offender apologises to their victim, pays reparations and takes action to address their criminogenic needs are as severe sanctions as the person may receive in court but can be delivered quickly and more targeted to the victim and the offender.

We propose investment in OOCs. Recruit and train specialist staff to take the assessment and determination or sanctions away from the Officer. Get the Officer back on the street where the public wants to see them. Invest in staff that bring local agencies into the reducing reoffending approach. Investment in technology that can ensure the collaboration between officers, offenders and the various agencies involved in the process.

This seemingly minor update radically changes the job of Policing in half of their caseload. We believe in the benefits of OOCs and any investment here will pay back tenfold, delivering hundreds of millions of pounds in benefits through reduced reoffending.

We have an enormous opportunity for society. It's the right thing to do. We must support the Police to implement it successfully.

Make Time Count is a social enterprise aiming to eliminate reoffending through technology. As a social enterprise they are committed to reinvesting 51% of their profits into a fund that will help vulnerable people start businesses.

If you would like to continue the discussion, please get in touch:

jonathan@maketimecount.today

Jonathan Ley

Founder of Make Time Count



www.maketimecount.today



Jonathan Ley

Further Reading

- [1] Reforms for OOC Framework: <https://bit.ly/3pXARs4>
- [2] Police Crime and Sentencing Bill: <https://bit.ly/3e6gqGO>
- [3] NPCC National Strategy: <https://bit.ly/3B0ri29>
- [4] Summary of research: <https://bit.ly/3q1HSII>



image: freepik.com

HOW TO CUT KNIFE CRIME?

Lady Val Corbett, Founder, The Corbett Network for Prisoner Reintegration

Yes, yes, I get it. Solving knife crime is complex. But I am so tired of reading about kids getting killed. One recent example of several was nine-year-old Lilia Valutyte in Boston. Lilia had her life cut short for no reason anyone could discover.

The father of a boy knifed to death days before his 13th birthday, sent a message of sympathy: "You will go through hell, be strong, take any help you get." Then he adds: "What is wrong with this world?" Good question and hopefully later in this article we might find some explanations.

We have to find ways to stop kids being murdered in the most barbaric way – it is against the laws of nature that children should pass away before their parents. Despite many in the field working hard, knife crime shows no sign of dying out – only youngsters do.

How to reduce and even eradicate this brutal crime was the question I asked people who had experience of knife crime. Their answers included the 'complex' word and unsurprisingly, funding was mentioned, but it was not the only solution.

Though one of our contributors said he did not see much had changed, there had been some inroads though progress is slow.

Meanwhile the stabbings continue.

Stats offer little comfort

The trend was broadly stable for two years, but fell slightly to 35% in year ending September 2020 due to the pandemic. In March to April 2020 there was a high custody rate (42%) which is likely to have increased due to the

prioritisation of cases being heard at court, so that the most serious offences were dealt with first.

Disturbing stat: For 72% of offenders, this was their first knife or offensive weapon possession offence.

Readers of this magazine know that London has the unenviable accolade of being the knife crime capital of the country – it's killing explosion has fuelled the capital's highest murder rate in more than a decade with 149 people stabbed in the capital in 2019–2020. Crucially, 10 people on average are caught with blades EVERY DAY on the streets of London.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan says we must deal with the causes, not the consequences, and this gained some traction in the recent Panorama programme on BBC1 which produced a coruscating account of knife crime and its effects.

One of Panorama's most startling statements is quoted here: "When we actively looked for anti-knife crime content, a 13-year-old's account was exposed to pro-knife groups, videos and pages on social media. No action was taken against a post showing off a knife on a 13-year-old's account on Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Snapchat. Tik Tok, however, did remove the content for violating its guidelines on dangerous acts, and was warned the account was close to being suspended."

The police also found videos of knives being flicked and shown off, and of boys linked to a recent murder attacking one another, which DCI Andy Howard told Panorama he believed were being shared "openly and very regularly" on Instagram and Snapchat: "There is certainly a very unhealthy attraction to filming, recording, acts of

really quite serious violence,"

The Panorama reporter showed several screen grabs from social media accounts to a group of children, but they weren't shocked by the results at all – and admitted they all see knives and violence regularly on their social media feeds.

"I've seen bigger knives to be honest," Jacob says of his own social media accounts.

"We get exposed more to people kind of showing them off," Poppy explains, talking about the image people her age try to portray mainly on Instagram, as well as Snapchat. One saw Rambo knives, and Izzy butterfly blades, which people share because they are colourful and more appealing.

The Online Safety Bill passing through Parliament with the Secretary of State at the time having high hopes: "This Bill is about keeping children and young people safe. These platforms know that knife content is being sent to young people's social media feeds. The companies can actually put what is wrong, right now."

Many fear those hopes will not be realised. In its current form, they think the Bill will not save lives because more needs to be done to verify the age of young users and to limit their exposure to harmful violent posts – even if the content might be legal.

So what can
be done –
to stop the surge
of knife crime?

PEOPLE WHO HELP WITH THE PROBLEM HAVE THEIR SAY

Keith Fraser, Youth Justice Board

Exploitation, county lines, organised crime and the vulnerability of the child all make fighting knife crime a complex issue. Children with whom we work, often say the main reason they have carried knives in the past is out of fear or coercive control.

We need to recognise that law enforcement alone will not make our communities safer and offer these children a healthy, happy, safe childhood from which to prosper. The wraparound care and multi-agency involvement these children need is crucial.

Prevention and diversion options for children on the cusp of the system should be prioritised and these options must support children to address the underlying cause of their offending behaviour – whether that's past trauma, coercive control or other factors.



Keith Fraser

Joe Raby, Senior Operations Manager

- Gangs and Violence Reduction Services, Catch-22 justice. Catch-22 are the principal partners of Fighting Knife Crime London

In the year ending March 2021 as published by the ONS there were around 41,000 incidents involving a knife or sharp instrument in England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester Police Force). This was 15% lower than in 2019/20 and 27% higher than in 2010/11. Although there has been improvement in recording practices since 2018/19 (www.ons.gov.uk, 2021) there has still been a steady rise with increased media attention and £130.5 million pound package of support to tackle serious violence, murder and knife crime was announced in March 2021 which highlights the continued concern of knife crime and how this can destroy lives, families, and communities.

• Firstly, it is important to note that knife crime is not a singular issue and support, prevention and rehabilitation services will need to have a localised response to knife crime, considering a range of different risk factors. Although you could have an overarching model to help reduce knife crime, such as a 1-2-1 mentoring service, it is important for the staff team to be relatable and know the area and community of those they are working with. For example, there are distinct difference between London, the West Midlands and Manchester so it couldn't be a uniformed approach.

- Understanding the environment: contextual safeguarding, as developed by Dr Carlene Firmin, is an approach to understanding and responding to significant harm experienced by young people, beyond their families. One key aspect of this is partnerships with the community, for example shop keepers, bus drivers, teachers, and retail workers, and the importance of a community response to help safeguard young people. These partnerships help address the underlying causes and not just the effects of safeguarding issues, i.e. these partners can use their influence to ensure harmful situations are reduced. An example of contextual safeguarding provision in practice could look like this: *'a taxi driver has noticed that a particular alleyway outside a popular park young where people congregate is dimly lit and not easily visible from the road, the taxi driver reports this to the council, and they add some lighting'*. As the taxi driver regularly drives that route, they have noticed a potential risk which might have been missed by other people.
- Finally, diversionary activities for young people and young adults are another important factor in the reduction of knife crime as this can create a sense of belonging, help individuals learn a new skill, and develop social skills. In turn, this can help support an exit plan for young people moving away from gang affiliation and associated violence. It can provide positive trusted role models for young people, to promote safe disclosures and information sharing, if they are concerned about something going on in their local area. This could be grooming, an emergence of gang associated activities, or thinking about carrying a knife for protection or alternatively, knowing someone

who has already started to carry a knife. It is important to note here, that these diversionary activities should be accessible to young people, taking into account cost, location and timing. These opportunities and interventions need to be created with the voice of the community to ensure that they are localised and meet the target audience.

The points mentioned above are not an exhaustive list, these are just some areas of focus that can help with the reduction of knife crime and associated violence. However, the most important point to reiterate is that all interventions need to be localised, person centred and involve the voice of the community to make sure they are holistic and dynamic, considering the continual changes in risk factors.

Mifta Choudhury, CEO Youth Ink charity

Children are not the problem. They are part of the solution.

As someone who carried knives, and survived over 12 years in prison, there is not much creativity and recognition of collaborative working to tackle knife crime, and tackle young people's inequalities, mental health, and opportunities for those young people involved with the Youth Justice System.

In February 2022, The London Assembly recognised that knife crime is a long-term issue nationally and that all agencies need to work together to tackle it. Contributing factors behind young people becoming involved in or a victim of violence are lack of opportunity, deprivation, and inequality.

During lockdown, knife crime dropped considerably, but these figures have now begun to increase with restrictions easing. The government's answer is to tackle the

issue by granting police more extraordinary powers to closely monitor stop and search, and punish "suspicious" young people.

I do not see much has moved forward.

Talking to young people involved with the Youth Justice System, they explained how they just want to complete what's required of them – 'wanna get through it'. Many felt decisions about their rehabilitation were largely outside their control.

Knife crime and crime is a social problem – its causes, not its symptoms, must be treated. We need to refill local communities with positive returning citizens, and be creative in the solutions we seek. We need to work together collaboratively with young people, ensuring they are part of the solution to knife crime, not part of the problem.

Young people need access to services, guidance, and opportunities to build their strengths, capacities, and aspirations and develop their pro-social relationships with adults. Our consultations with young people indicate that this approach increases young people's success and achievements while decreasing negative behaviours and outcomes.

Young people must be diverted away



Mifta Choudbury, CEO of Youth Ink was commended by Princess Anne for his work helping young people break a cycle of crime and re-offending.

from the youth justice system into positive, nurturing relationships. These environments should provide aspirations, and appropriate learning environments to improve young peoples' lives and life chances by building relationships and playing an active role in the community while reducing criminal and antisocial outcomes.

Responses to youth crime and knife crime must be a child-first approach. Relationships must involve collaborative solutions for engaging with young people which are sustainable and productive. Imposing interventions on young people is a short-term solution.

It is essential to recognise that many young people do not choose to offend and often find they are trying to resist and confront those who carry knives.



Mifta Choudbury

David Apparicio MBE, Magistrate, CEO Chrysalis Programme

Carrying a knife is a cultural rite of passage like getting a tattoo. I believe in 200 years, people will say: 'Would you believe they didn't invest in young people as we do? No wonder they had such a high rate of knife crime.'

When I was young, we had youth clubs, adventure playgrounds, even a church social club where, after listening to a 15

minute sermon, you could have two hours using their facilities. There were also after-school clubs where you stayed until 5 pm so there wasn't much time to wait for parents returning from work.

Now you have kids released from school at 3pm with nothing to do until their parent/s get back from work. Where are these amenities today?

Knife crime will be an insoluble problem unless, and until, money is spent on giving young people somewhere to go instead of hanging around McDonalds or street corners.



David Apparicio

Eva Hamilton MBE, CEO, Key4Life charity

BBC London TV News highlighted the tragic death of London's recent knife crime victim, 16 year old Teon Campbell-Pitter, and then showed how our charity is trying to reduce knife crime with the vital work we are doing with its new White City Estate programme in West London.

With knife crime rising, and communities feeling increasingly unsafe, we have embarked on a new place-based approach to tackling the problem and creating safety, starting with this first pilot programme which aims to bring

opportunity and hope back into the community.

We also ran a three-day holiday programme with 25 children attending, which included workshops, boxing, music workshops, football with QPR FC, rowing with Fulham Reach Boat Club, and the Key4life horses. This is only a start, but we aim to make permanent inroads into reducing the numbers.



Eva Hamilton MBE

Ben Eckett, Co-Founder, Gloves not Gunz

Knife crime is a complex issue that requires a range of interventions to help prevent and reduce young people from using weapons.

There needs to be a combination of education, therapeutic intervention, diversionary activities and community work to make an impact on breaking the cycle of knife crime. Our experience at Gloves Not Gunz of supporting young people with these issues has shown common themes in why young people are carrying and using weapons on the streets. These tend to be young people not in education or employment, adverse childhood experiences, lack of

support and activities, and negative peer relationships.

Our work aims to tackle these issues through mentoring, education and employment pathways, therapy and offering positive activities during key times in which young people could be vulnerable (evenings and weekends).

Our team are all using 'trauma informed' approaches to support young people and families, and our work is underpinned by the Anna Freud AMBIT model. This Adaptive Mentalisation Based Integrative Treatment is an approach to helping people who have multiple needs and was developed at the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families. The AMBIT programme provides consultation, training and supervision to teams or 'whole-systems working' with a range of age groups in a range of settings: health, social care, youth provision, education and justice.

There are many other more political issues that have caused serious youth violence to escalate in the past 10 years. However, we focus on solutions and making sure we're getting the best possible outcomes for young people and families.



Ben Eckett

Personal Stories

Owen's story

I first got introduced to Youth Ink in 2021 while on a 6-month referral order at the Youth Offending Service (YOS).

This was not my first referral order. I came to YOS as I started associating with the wrong company and was eager to make money in any way I saw fit, regardless of whether it was against the law. And this led to me repeatedly returning to the YOS on Court Referral Orders. I had no intention of changing my ways, and instead, focused on finishing my order and continuing on my previous path.

At the start of my second order, I was introduced to the founder of Youth Ink, Mifta Choudhury who described the work the charity did to support and



help young people in the youth justice system by using the lived experiences of the workers.

Not long after meeting him, I began to attend regular sessions with members of the charity, the Peer-led Conversation Hub, held on Tuesdays at the YOS. With the help of Youth Ink, I realised that I didn't need to revert to doing what I was doing, and the charity helped me think about the consequences my behaviour would have on my family and friends if I continued. This has led me to change the path that I was headed on by becoming a volunteer, and securing a session role with the charity working at Southwark YOS, supporting other young people like me.

Through the charity, I had the opportunity to visit the Ministry of Justice to participate in workshops with other young people involved with the Youth Justice Board (YJB). There I met Nicola Kefford, the YJB stakeholder manager who led the workshop. We all had to think of ways in which we could help MPs to devise policies aimed at protecting and supporting young

people in the criminal justice system instead of instantly punishing them.

We spoke about education, young people's mental health, household financial stability schemes and more where everyone could speak out on topics in a very open-minded environment. I found the workshop valuable and I am looking forward to working with the YJB as a YJB ambassador. I am also a sessional worker for Youth Ink and will never return to my previous life.

James's Story

James lived with mum and her partner when his mum and dad were going through a separation period. He had a poor relationship with his mum's partner, witnessing domestic abuse in the household. On one occasion, James held a knife to his mum's partner to stop the abuse. This resulted in a strained relationship between James and his mum. James started attending Southwark Youth Offending Service for his 12-month Referral Order for possession of a knife. He was referred to the Peer Navigator Network to

meet with other young people who had shared similar experiences, who support him to develop, and manage his emotions.

Liam's Story

Liam came to the Youth Offending Service for his 6-month Referral Order for possession of a knife. His brother's involvement in violent crime and fear of his attacks were negatively impacting Liam's wellbeing, having experienced some upheaval and trauma in his childhood and living with his single-parent mum. She also has had traumatic experiences, and was struggling with his elder brother's offending, and gang involvement. Liam was at high risk of entering into criminal behaviour himself and following his brother's path.

Liam attended Southwark Youth Offending Service summer residential, a program led by Youth Ink staff. Despite it being his first time away from his home and family, he fully immersed himself in the experience, taking responsibility as a volunteer to support the residential staff. Liam later described this as one of the best experiences he's ever had; it made him feel good about himself and left him more determined to make positive changes and decisions in life.

When Liam started at the YOS, he was quiet and shy, especially in groups. As he progressed through the court order, he opened up in discussions, particularly around Pathways and Choices looking at the potential and realistic consequences of carrying a weapon and dealing drugs. Liam now says he's a lot better at dealing with problems when they arise, including

his emotional issues. He hasn't re-offended since participating in Youth Ink's Programmes.

Melchi's Story

Melchi was at risk of using offending to manage his negative emotions and experiences. He was referred to the Peer Navigator Network to meet with other young people who had shared similar experiences. The objective of Melchi's participation was to understand his trauma better, to reflect on his life experiences and in turn, develop a more positive self-image.

When Melchi first started coming to the Youth Offending Service, it negatively impacted his self-confidence. His school peers knew he was involved in the criminal justice system, making him feel stigmatized by both classmates and staff.

As his court order progressed, Melchi became more vocal within the Peer-Led Conversation Hub discussing his trauma and journey with other young people. His new-found confidence led him to lead on a JAC centre project, sharing his personal experience and acting as a positive role model for similar backgrounds. Melchi had the rest of his court order revoked 6months early due to the progress he made through Youth Ink. He has not committed any further offences since and now works a Peer Support Navigator (PSN) in a paid sessional role. As a PSN, he supports other people like himself to access services and break down stigmas around emotional wellbeing and mental health. "Working at Youth Ink has changed my life."

What do others say?

Knife crime affects families ...

The family of "John":

We feel imprisoned by our grief and trauma. We cannot see a way of recovering from this. John had his whole life ahead of him. Those who attacked our son get to see their families and have a future, John does not.

... it also affects police officers called to the scene:

A Detective Chief Inspector:

"Look at the pain these incidents cause - not only could you take away someone else's future and destroy the lives of their loved ones, but also your own and those of your family and friends. Dozens of lives are destroyed by the devastating consequences of carrying these weapons."

Thoughts after writing this article

The key word for me is what my Network practices: collaboration. Instead of working in their own ponds, may I suggest that organisations evolve into an influential, crusading group, promoting cohesive solutions to the Secretary of State for Justice.

Finally, I reference Bruce Houlder, Founder of Fighting Knife Crime London: "We really do need to fire up the National debate for what I think is a forgotten generation".

Their online magazine should be required reading for all those involved in the area of knife crime. It has a wide

readership. As well as approximately 650 directory member organisations, it has a up-to-date library of reports, research and statistical information, a video and news area, and a social media presence as well.

You can subscribe here:

www.fightingknife crime.london/subscription.

Lady Val Corbett,

Founder, The Corbett Network for Prisoner Reintegration



The Corbett Network
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Lady Val

Drugs, Gangs and Knife Crime

Sir Stephen O'Brien, Vice Chair, Business in The Community

Some things move on depressingly slowly. We seem to have been reading books and articles in the press as well as listening to political speeches on this topic for most of my lifetime. I have unearthed an article of mine which the FT published in 1985. The opening paragraph describes a character called Alfonso who grew up in inner London and was highly numerate and alert. His friends said he could make a price instantly, off the top of his head, for the delivery of any quantity of cocaine. He has, I observed, because it was the world I had come from, the same skills as the sharpest dealer in commodities or financial futures in the Square Mile. But he was destined for the criminal justice system because nobody gave him a break and the personal support he needed.

For all the discussion and hand wringing around the early deaths of so many young men in London every year, and all the support offered by a small number of wonderful charities, we still fail Alfonso's successors today and look like continuing to do so. The difference between Alfonso and a successful and well paid dealer in financial services is that nobody gave him a real chance. I suggest that employers, and employers alone, can break this cycle.

There is nothing new in this: the Rowntree, Wedgewood and Cadbury families and many of our Victorian business leaders had strongly developed ideas about caring for their workforces. Behind their thinking often lay a religious (and specifically non-conformist)

Christian faith. It matched the energy and creativity of contemporary social pioneers like Lord Shaftesbury. This extraordinary reforming aristocrat had come to see that there could be no route out of deep working-class poverty without education and without a reduction in the legally permitted working hours of children to ten hours a day. There is a wonderful re-creation of Lord Shaftesbury's Ragged Schools, as they became known, in a museum in Copperfield Road, Tower Hamlets. In reality, it took another century, and the Butler Act of 1944, to provide education of a breath and standard which we can recognise today. But it remains unequal and patchy in its outcomes. Around 40 per cent of all youngsters growing up in Local Authority care today end up homeless or in the criminal justice system. Trading in drugs is often perceived to be a quick route to break out of a deeply depressing introduction to life.

There are still visionary business leaders in our midst today and they are the successors of Lord Shaftesbury and those Victorian families.

Much more recently, the last decades of the twentieth century saw an explosion of corporate engagement in the community at the same time as so many of the traditional large employers, in ship building, steel and coal mining, declined and decimated their local communities. Heirs of the Victorians, like Sir Alastair Pilkington, Chairman of the Lancashire family firm of glass makers, found that they were forced

to lay off large numbers of vulnerable employees.

Sir Alastair thought that 'something had to be done' and this something turned out to be the creation of a national network of Local Enterprise Agencies supporting redundant employees to create their own small businesses. This was real leadership, and it changed our attitude to the creation and development of small business. This led, in turn, to the realisation that strengthening the local community was good for business because you would sell more of your goods or services into communities which were prospering.

Those business leaders of the 1980s have left us now, and their successors have mostly delegated their community support efforts to specialist departments managing a mixture of charitable giving and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Sir James Timpson provides a wonderful exception. He has built his whole business model around offering an opportunity to those who in practice have fallen out of our system but, when given a chance and a sense of purpose, have grasped the opportunity.

Our current business leaders, encouraged by governments, have grasped the point that they are in pole position to help avert all the looming horrors of global warming: indeed, if they don't do so, there is no real prospect of a sustainable future for our planet. We now need to widen this out so that business leaders are addressing other long time unresolved issues.

As the technology entrepreneur and charismatic Lord Lieutenant of London, Sir Ken Olisa, puts it: 'There is huge talent just waiting to be harnessed and trained to build dynamic businesses and make existing businesses more

profitable – we neglect this to our own disadvantage.'

So, the call is for leaders of business, and indeed all employers, to see that they could transform and enhance the life prospects and career satisfaction of our care leavers. There is nothing very new in this. Sonia Blandford in her excellent book called "Born to Fail?" quotes the CBI as saying a generation ago 'Business can and must do more to ensure that someone's background or postcode does not define their life chances'. To do this they will need to look carefully at, and be prepared to change, some of their recruitment practises while offering on-going support, encouragement and mentoring to their recruits.

Ciaran Thapar, himself a very effective youth worker in Lambeth writes in his hugely relevant recent book 'Cut Short' 'The fact that young black males are disproportionately represented in school exclusions and prison, let alone fatal stabbings in London should be considered a social injustice for which we are all responsible'. There is much current talk about the need for a 'public health' approach to this with reference to work in Glasgow. This means that all of us who care about our future society should be engaged in the struggle to provide effective support and care for our young people, especially at this time of severe cut back to all public services for young people.

Thapar goes on to say, 'What is universal about young people who become involved in violence -especially perpetrators – is that they are typically poor, socially and educationally excluded'.

Businesses need not be on their own in this. A characteristic of so many

youngsters emerging from care is a lack of personal confidence and a network to support them. It is not for everyone, but we know that involvement in sport and the arts can build confidence and teamwork like almost nothing else. Working with Leadership Through Sport and some of our great London sports clubs like West Ham United, Tottenham Hotspur, The Boxing Academy, Saracens Rugby Club, Essex County Cricket Club, Water City Music, and really effective youth clubs like Onside and the Osmani Centre, would transform prospects for demoralised youngsters almost overnight. We know that all would be delighted to work with employers to build a new generation of confident young care leavers. It won't happen if left to the public sector on its own. But surely the task of offering fulfilling work opportunities to Care leavers, most of whom would be real assets if given the chance, cannot be beyond the leadership of employers.

So what could be the specific role of employers in this frightening environment? Here are four suggestions:

1. Proactively support, train and recruit youngsters from difficult backgrounds into their organisations. Specifically, support a new initiative, called Breaking Barriers, being piloted in the London Borough of Haringey. It is aimed at the smaller end of the fast-growing IT sector. There is a shortage of young people in this sector now and local employers, through a Salesforce training scheme can recruit highly resilient local youngsters to help build their own organisations.
2. Support London Bids (Business Improvement Districts) to train their local workforces to deal with knife crime emergencies at or near their premises.

3. Ensure that a growing proportion of their charity and social programmes are directly focussed on the hardest to help young people.

4. Work with the many other organisations in this space committed to bringing positive change and reducing the terrible misery and wastage of gang warfare and knife crime. A first step could be through getting a free subscription to this magazine straight to your inbox. You can do this here, www.fightingknife crime.london/subscription. You can also of course donate here, www.fightingknife crime.london/donate.

Finally, if employers begin to shout out publicly about their work in this area, they will build the argument that business has a genuine social purpose and is driven by so much more than earnings per share. This would go a long way to reverse the erosion of public trust in the business sector.

Sir Stephen O'Brien
Vice Chair, Business in The Community



Sir Stephen O'Brien



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Supporting young people to make safer choices about drugs

How To Make Youth Work Work

Joseph Duncan, Director, YouthFutures

When Bruce invited me to write an article for Fighting Knife Crime UK I thought it would be a good opportunity to review and reflect on the values that Youth Futures has been operating with successfully for the past 10 years in Camberwell South London.

Our grass roots youth work organisation is based in one of the most challenging estates in London. Over the years we have had to deal with violence, complex local political and bureaucratic challenges, gangs and entrenched resentment towards formal institutions from the young people we work with. We hold a space where up to 120 young people from surrounding communities would come down each week, have fun, gain support and any issues would be able to be worked through before they spiralled. Due to funding cuts our service is currently hanging by a thread.

We have been building our youth work model over this period and find that each of the following themes are critical. They not only encourage youth participation but go a lot further to enabling us to build effective support relationships with the young people we work with. Once we have strong, trusting and authentic relationships with the young people we can then collaborate with them in sourcing the self-esteem, vision and confidence they need to grow into the person they aspire to be.

Youth Led:

This is probably the most important

dynamic in our work. It involves recognising that the young people we work with are the experts when it comes to what they need and what will serve them best in their development. It involves sitting down and having conversations with the young people, getting behind their ideas and blowing wind in their sails. We also invite them to decision-making meetings and give them meaningful voting rights and opportunities to meet stake-holders and ultimately take on authoritative positions in the organisation such as trusteeship. They should be the ones who design and inform their youth service.

Interdependence - Ubuntu:

The youth worker works with the resources available to them including family, friends and community to help them move towards interdependent living. When we first start working with a young person in crisis they will likely be quite dependent on us, various institutions and others. We work with them shoulder to shoulder until they achieve independence which means they have their own positive momentum, motivated by positive goals, and capacity to move forward without systematic institutional support. The third step is interdependence which the young person achieves when they recognise the interdependence of all of us and how when they offer support and are of service to others it actually serves them as well.

Profile
Szymon
15 years
Chose who want to live in the future...
Has been smoking cigarettes for 6 months and has been offered 'spice'.

Setting
At a friend's house in the afternoon with a group of people from school.

Situation
Has been smoking cigarettes for 6 months and has been offered 'spice'.

Session Plan
Drugs and Alcohol
I will need:
Profile, Situation, Setting - sufficient for each individual, pair or group.
Blank Profile, Situation and Setting cards
SKILL Decision Making Model - sufficient for each individual, pair or group
SKILL Decision Making Note sheets - sufficient for each individual, pair or group
Drug and Alcohol Legislation and Information sheet
Writing paper and pens/pencils for students (Not provided)

Game Outcomes
● Explore and research the law in relation to drugs and alcohol
● Apply the SKILL Decision Making Model in a variety of situations related to drug use
● Practice effective decision making
● Recognise that all drugs and alcohol can be harmful

Notes to Facilitator
Your role as the facilitator is crucial to the success of the Life Skills Game session and preparation is essential before the game is played.
Prior to commencing the game the facilitator(s) should make themselves conversant with the Session Plan, the SKILL Decision Making Model sheet and the Drugs and Alcohol Legislation and Information sheet.
When working with one large group, you may wish to make A3 copies of the Profile, Setting and Situation cards and regardless, it is useful to make larger copies of the Notes sheet to assist group work.
The Facilitator should also be prepared to define and discuss the concepts of risk, peer pressure, personal values and personal responsibility.
It is important that you have knowledge of the subject matter. The Drugs and Alcohol Legislation and Information sheet provides details of websites, links and other sources of information to assist you.
It is likely that during the game, participants will require prompting in order to engage in a full discussion and a key part of your role as facilitator will be to challenge the group's thinking by asking 'how', 'why' and 'what if' type questions. The mixing of Profile, Situation and Setting cards will enable the group to consider and discuss a wide range of scenarios.
The facilitator is provided with a number of Red and Yellow cards with the option to be used at any time to assist in supporting and encouraging students to explain their thinking and decision making. The Red card indicates a 'Medium to High' risk scenario and the Yellow card indicates a 'No to Medium' risk scenario. The rear of both cards prompts students to consider the 5 'W's in the scenario.

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Informed, Knowledgeable Young People

Thought-provoking card games addressing risky behaviour, staying safe and making healthy decisions.

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Examines the **consequences** of risky behaviour in relation to the law and keeping safe and healthy.

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Consistency, commitment and contact:

All of our staff and volunteers are asked for a minimum of a 6-month commitment to working with the organisation and most stay for much longer than this. This enables deeper, more trusting relationships to form between the young people and their staff. As we never know when an urgent need will arise for a young person we want to be contactable by them whenever they need us.

Creating a safe and nurturing family environment:

Acting as a second family and creating a caring environment for vulnerable young people creates safe and nurturing environments that can have a profound impact on healing a troubled young person's mind. Just one effective trusting relationship can be transformative for a young person. We do this by coming together for shared meals and practising compassion and care with one another. A sense of a second family emerges naturally when the young people are related to with compassion and empathy which we encourage in our youth workers. We also have lots of fun activities where positive relationships can flourish.

Personal development:

Our staff use personal development tools and coaching and mentoring models to support young people. We help young people identify where they are at in different areas of their lives such as health, relationships and education etc. We then explore where they want to get to in these different areas of their lives and what specific actions they want to take to move themselves forward. Through this process of self-determination, we often find that the

young people we work with have self-esteem and confidence issues which can prevent them from moving forward. Once these are explored and talked through, we find that the young people have more focus, clarity and energy to move forward in their goals.

Early intervention and prevention:

We build strong and honest relationships with young people which enables us to identify negative influences that together we can respond effectively to before they become worse. Almost everyone who ends up in prison started by making a small mistake. If they had had a different conversation or had a different set of relationships at the point of that destructive decision it is quite likely a different decision would have been made.

Restorative approach:

When a young person we are working with does something which has a negative or destructive impact we hold them to account. We first ensure that the young person understands what happened and the impact of their behaviour. We then move to place of reconciliation and restoring of relationships and impact. This may involve an apology and potentially reparations depending on the situation.

Authenticity and empathy:

We encourage our youth workers to see themselves as equal human beings with the young people we work with and to relate to the young people in a genuine and honest way. We recognise that we have as much to learn through being in relationship with the young person as they may have to gain from us. Being able to relate to the young people like this means that empathy comes a lot more easily and with empathy comes trust and

with trust comes supportability. This then provides the foundation for developing interdependence as mentioned above.

Holistic approach:

The young people we support usually have a range of complex needs that we respond to holistically. We therefore do not only focus on one aspect with our young people such as employment or health but work with the young person and their challenges whilst considering the constellation of other factors that are at play in their lives. This gives our staff the flexibility to respond to the young person's needs as they arise rather than demand a particular focus.

Citizenship and Leadership:

We encourage young people to step into positions of responsibility and leadership in their community so that they can increase their self-confidence and communication skills and their contribution to society. Encouraging them to speak out on issues that affect them, creating platforms for them to speak truth to power and supporting them to make genuine and meaningful change in their communities.

Sense of adventure and fun:

We make our activities deliberately fun and enjoyable and bring a sense of adventure to the young person's development. Whether through sports, games, trips or otherwise when things are fun and adventure is present young people come to life and the best work is able to be done.

Exposure - getting outside their comfort zone:

We take the young people out of their normal environment and give them

opportunities to gain new experiences, skills and perspectives. This may include going on a residential, a trip across town or even a job search day in Central London.

This is not an exhaustive list of the approaches and values that are important when working with young people. They are however stand-out themes which are important to consider when working with young people who are growing up in deprived neighbourhoods. I hope it is helpful and that youth work becomes more accessible and effective over the next few years. The need is immense.

Joseph Duncan
Director, YouthFutures



YOUTHFUTURES

youthfutures.org.uk



'WINNER - Best Organisation For Dealing With Youth Conflict 2019'



Joseph Duncan



Tackling Knife Crime: Why do universal prevention programmes matter?

Patrick Green, CEO, The Ben Kinsella Trust

In April 2008, frustrated by the lack of action from government to protect young people from violence, a 16-year-old Ben Kinsella wrote to the Prime Minister urging him to create a society where young people could live “peaceful and safe lives”. Three months later, returning home after a night out with friends, Ben was stabbed to death by three strangers in an unprovoked attack.

Not long after his death his sister Brooke and her parents, George, and Deborah, set up the Trust in Ben’s name with the simple aim of trying to stop what happened to them happening to another family. However, understanding how they might be able to do this was a much more daunting challenge.

Over the next 3 years, Brooke Kinsella took time out of her acting career to learn more about what could

be done to stop violence. During this time Brooke undertook a commission from the BBC to visit New York and produce a documentary on how that city was dealing with teenagers and gun crime. In June 2010 she was asked by the Home Secretary to head up a fact-finding mission into the work of organisations and projects designed to prevent young people carrying and using knives. Brooke undertook a series of visits across England and Wales, looking at the variety of good work being done to end violence. In 2011, Brooke published her report entitled Tackling Knife Crime Together, setting out a number of recommendations to reduce youth violence and knife crime.

Following the publication, the Ben

Kinsella Trust sat down to digest the report findings to see where we could make a difference. The report highlighted the need for more early intervention projects and more initiatives to support schools to educate young people about the dangers of knife crime. We were very keen to explore how we could help schools to deliver their early intervention work in a sensitive and compelling way.

We also sought the views of young people to find out what they felt was missing in the current approach. They told us that they wanted more than a lecture or talk on the subject. They wanted to be involved in the creation of the materials. They wanted to learn through interaction and engaging with people with lived experience rather than

learn through case studies. Authenticity and localism were especially important to them.

We looked at the different approaches being taken to convey the impact and learning that lived experience can offer the educator. As a starting point we looked at the work of the Anne Frank Museum and how installations and exhibitions can bring to life the reality of other people's experiences. Exhibitions give the visitor an insight and an emotional connection to the subject that is almost impossible to create in a talk or lesson. Exhibitions are designed to induce empathy as well as giving the visitor a deeper understanding of the subject matter by making learning visible. They allow the visitor to move through an immersive space, learning at their own pace, and it is quite different to studying in a classroom setting. Exhibitions accommodate different learning styles and provide an invigorating experience that induces reflection, debate and embeds learning. We saw the exhibition model as the perfect companion for the assembly talks, Personal & Social Health Education (PSHE) lessons and mentoring programmes that were already being delivered through schools and youth work.

Having looked very carefully at the positive outcomes achieved by the Anne Frank Museum and other exhibitions, we believed that there was huge merit in creating an anti-knife crime exhibition.

In 2012, our first exhibition opened in Islington. The exhibition was created using five rooms, all with distinct themes but all interlinked. The Islington exhibition includes Ben's story and the effect that his murder had on his friends and family. It also considers the life of a young person who becomes a perpetrator of violence, the impact it has on them and the ripple

effect into wider society.

Following the success of our Islington exhibition, we opened our second exhibition in partnership with the National Justice Museum in Nottingham in 2019. In 2021, we opened our third exhibition in Barking and Dagenham. These exhibitions include the stories of local young people who lost their lives to knife crime to ensure that the exhibition experience reflects the localism and diversity of the young people who visit.

It is now ten years since we opened our first exhibition and during this time, we have had over 20,000 young visitors through our doors. Here is a brief summary of what they told us about their experience.

- Before their visit, most young people tell us that they do not carry a knife, and that they are not involved in any form of criminality. They also indicate that they already know that if they were to carry a knife it would put them in greater danger. Given these statements it may be difficult to understand what benefits an exhibition visit has for these young people. But despite all the positive behaviours that this group display, there is often a reluctance to stop a friend carrying a knife. They often feel that it is not their place to challenge the autonomy of peers, or they feel that they do not have the subject matter knowledge or the confidence to make a stand.
- After their visit to the exhibition, over 80% state that they would intervene to stop a friend carrying a knife. This demonstrates that the exhibition visit induces a greater sense of responsibility in those who attend, which leads to a

change in peer group values.

- Our data confirms that fear and concerns over personal safety often lead to young people carrying a knife. Young people who felt unsafe in their area were over 3 times more likely to carry a knife than those who usually felt safe.
- For those who attend the exhibition and admit having considered carrying or have carried a knife, the exhibition experience results in 75% of these young people stating that they will no longer carry a knife.
- Our data also tells us that a small proportion of vulnerable young people remain unchanged by the exhibition visit. No intervention is 100% successful. We know that many young people need far more than a 2 hour visit to help them overcome the challenges they face to live safer lives. But the exhibition visit often highlights these vulnerabilities long before a school have noticed them, enabling the school to put in place the additional support for these young people, before their behaviour has led to them getting into serious trouble in school or bringing them into contact with the criminal justice system. We know that the exhibition visit may highlight the need for specialist support or mentoring for some young people. With our close connections to local youth services, we are often able to make it much easier for schools to find the right support for their young people.

To assist with follow up lessons or additional learning, we have created a set of free PSHE lesson plans for this

purpose. QR codes are present in each of the rooms to help teachers or youth work practitioners download these resources on site. This enables them to build tailored lessons or workshops for their groups, continuing the groups learning after the exhibition visit.

I believe that these outcomes demonstrate that universal prevention programmes are an important element of a public health approach to tackling violence. It is vital that we do not overlook the need to educate and talk to young people about the dangers of knife crime just because they are not outwardly showing signs of risk or vulnerability. By doing so we are identifying need much earlier. Crucially though, we are also providing an effective counter narrative to the messaging that young people often encounter on social media which is used to normalise and justify knife carrying.

Patrick Green

CEO, The Ben Kinsella Trust



The Ben Kinsella Trust

benkinsella.org.uk



Patrick Green



Image: Macrovector - Freepik.com

How our drug laws are killing our children

Chris Daw QC

I have been a criminal defence lawyer for almost 30 years.

I have acted for children and young people throughout that time, including in cases of drug trafficking, armed robbery and even murder.

In England, we criminalise and incarcerate young people at a higher rate than anywhere else in Western Europe. We also have one of the lowest ages of criminal responsibility in the world. Children as young as 10 can be arrested, prosecuted and even given custodial sentences, which may extend

well into their adult lives.

For the first 20 years of my career, I was a busy junior barrister, often finishing one trial in the morning and starting the next one in the afternoon. Like most in the criminal justice system, I had a form of professional tunnel vision, entirely engrossed in what I had to do each day, with no consideration of why things are the way they are. Surely, someone must have thought this through? There must be a good reason why we in England are so addicted to prosecution as a remedy for all the ills of our society.

In 2013, I took Silk and became a QC, known formally as One of Her Majesty's Counsel, Learned in the Law. My practice changed beyond recognition from my junior years. I finally had time to think between cases. I was asked to write for newspapers and magazines on criminal justice issues. Television and radio interviews followed and eventually, in 2020, I made a series for BBC1 – "Crime – Are we Tough Enough?" – and published my first book, "Justice on Trial – Radical Solutions for a System at Breaking Point".

In the course of the past decade I have had many lightbulb moments, looking back on cases from over the years and questioning what on earth the point of them was. I distilled my doubts down to one basic issue or, rather, the one missing ingredient from criminal justice policy – does the way we use arrest, prosecution and imprisonment in England actually reduce the amount of crime and suffering in our society?

I soon realised that politicians of all parties, responsible for developing justice policy in recent decades, the criminal law and sentencing levels, have no interest in that fundamental question at all. Policy is driven by a toxic combination of doing things the way we have always done them and knee jerk responses to high profile cases in the headlines. In no area of policy is this blinkered approach more evident than for drug crime and youth justice, where the damage comes on three main fronts.

Drug prohibition, in its current draconian form, began with the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which introduced severe criminal sanctions for most forms of drug possession and

supply, including for heroin, which had previously been used by a tiny number of people, mostly on prescription. A decade later, there were hundreds of thousands of heroin addicts, supplied entirely by the black market, where violent and murderous competition was rife. The deadly crack epidemic of the 80s followed and, to this day, Organised Crime Groups operate with ruthless efficiency up and down the country.

Make no mistake, drugs are not responsible for all this human misery. The law is.

The first major impact on the young comes in the form of exploitation by the violent criminals who control the drug trade. We have seen massive sentence inflation over recent years, to the point where even mid-level drug dealers can be sent to prison for a decade or longer. At the very top end, stratospheric sentences of 30 years and more have become routine in our courts.

As a direct result of the consequences for adults, arrested and prosecuted for drug offences, dealers and gangs have changed their tactics for the delivery of drugs around our cities and across the country. Rather than hardened adult criminals, acting as couriers for drugs, we have seen an explosion in use of children to take drugs around the country, generally on trains and other forms of public transport. This has become known as "County Lines", referring to the supply chains between major cities, small towns and rural areas, where dealers have found lucrative markets for expansion.

The truth is that County Lines is nothing less than child exploitation on a massive scale. Some of the most

vulnerable children in our society are preyed upon, groomed, taken out of school and subjected to violence if they ever seek to leave the clutches of the gangs they serve.

The second impact of drug prohibition on young people is the criminalisation for life of tens of thousands of them, purely for low level drug possession and supply offences. Although some may be treated as victims of exploitation these days, many more are arrested with drugs, either for personal use or small-scale supply, and end up trapped in the revolving doors of criminal justice, throughout their youth and into adult life. Education goes out of the window, further grooming takes place in prison and any chance of engagement in legitimate employment is extinguished by the metaphorical tattoo of a criminal record.

The final major impact of drug policy is perhaps the most tragic of all. I wrote in *Justice on Trial* of the wasteful and completely avoidable death of 15 year-old Martha Fernback from a massive overdose of MDMA, known to most of us as “ecstasy”.

In lower doses, MDMA is one of the safest drugs, at least in terms of the risk of sudden death. Martha died, not because she took ecstasy, but because she and her friends had no way of knowing that the powder they had bought was 92% pure MDMA. The dose Martha took contained enough of the active ingredient to kill ten grown men. She passed out shortly after taking it and never woke up. If ecstasy were available through a legal and licensed supply chain, as I believe it should be, there is no way that Martha would have taken the amount of pure drug that she did. She, and thousands of other child victims of overdose, would be alive and well.

I interviewed Martha’s mother, Ann-Marie, during my research for *Justice on Trial*. She is now a prominent campaigner for drug law reform, making the argument that children will always experiment with drugs and that our only priority as a society should be to protect them from harm when they do so. I agree.

The time has come to stop the madness of the failed and unwinnable War on Drugs and start to treat drugs, especially as they impact on the lives of our young people, as a public health emergency. We need to remove drug use and supply from the criminal justice system altogether by legalising and controlling it, which would in turn free children from exploitation, end the cycle of premature criminalisation and save countless young lives, lost to overdose and contamination.

In the end, drug and youth policy should be made, not in a vain attempt to appear tough on crime, but based on what actually works to reduce crime and death from drugs and, most of all, to protect our young people; not to punish and even kill them.



Chris Daw QC

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