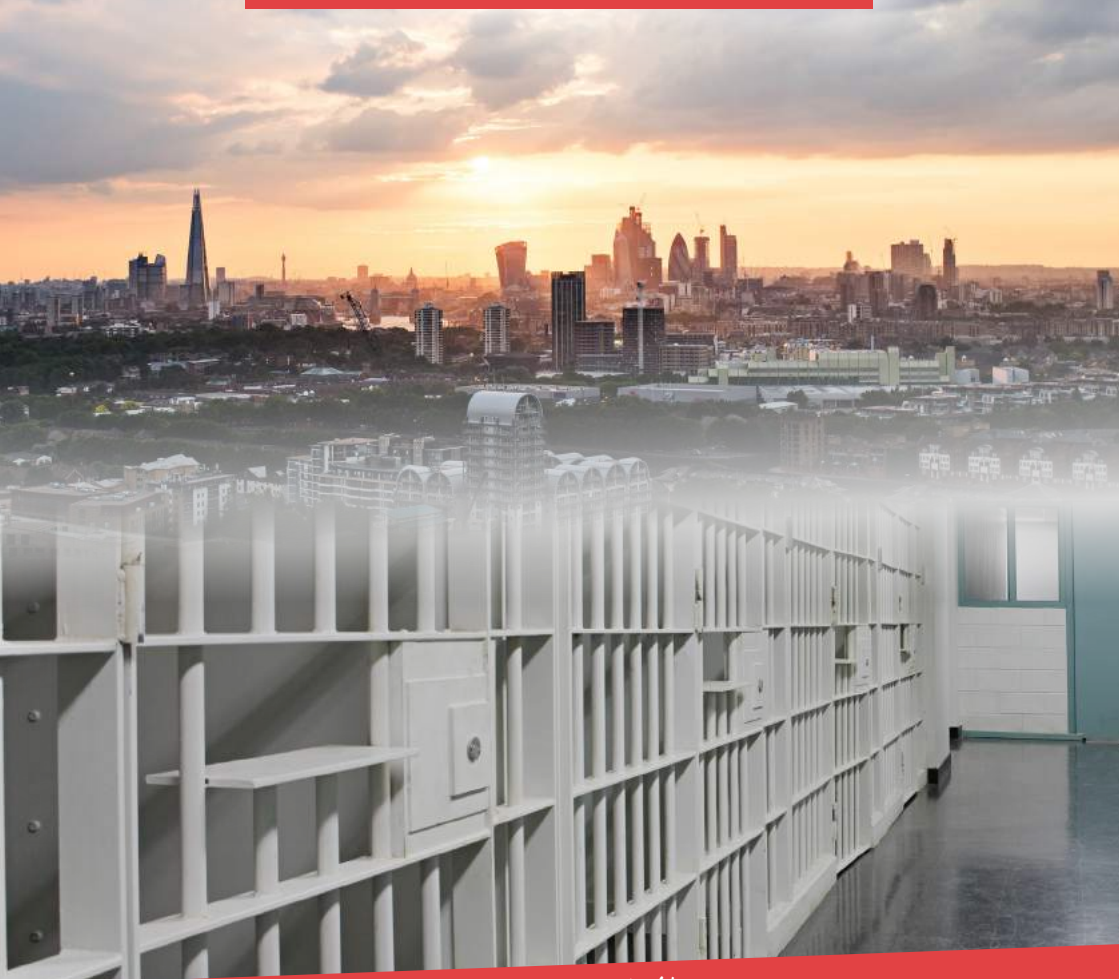


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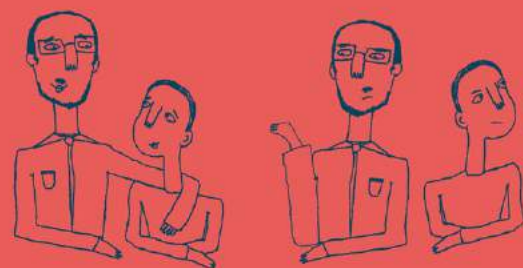
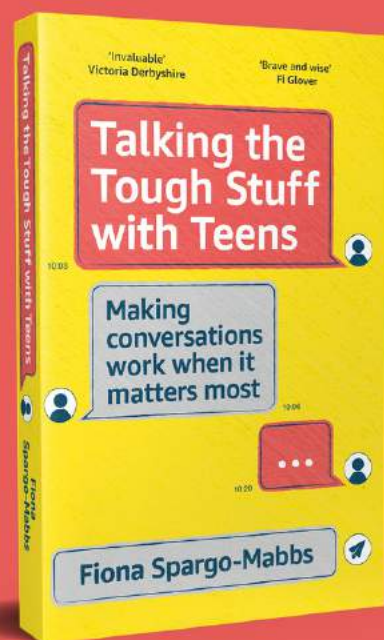
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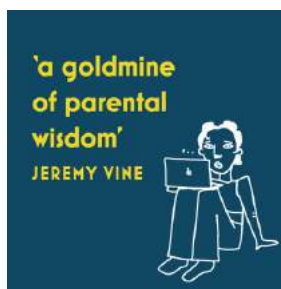
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From the author of *I Wish I'd Known*



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Our founder James Kaguima has received the East London Young Community Hero Award & Special Recognition Award from the High Sheriff of Greater London for leading the Skate Cabal: Rolling in Peace Initiative. Additionally, he has has spoken at London Tech Week where he shared his journey building the Skate Cabal App and amplifying safe spaces for the community

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Foreword

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

This 6th edition of FKCL's magazine addresses several inter-connected themes. We deal with caring for our children in schools, drug education, how we deal with young people within our criminal justice system. It questions our present sentencing regime, and the way we treat young people in custody, and how this can be improved. And there is more.

The quality of those who express their opinions in this edition lives up to the serious and high quality we have set with earlier editions. Dealing with the way we treat offenders (and much more besides) are two former Old Bailey judges who are amongst those few with the greatest experience in the country of dealing with young and violent offending. They are

Her Honour Wendy Joseph KC and **His Honour Nicholas Cooke KC**. We have a close look at the way we treat our young prisoners, compared with the way other countries approach the same challenge. Looking particularly at Norway, serious questions are asked about how England and Wales comply with international standards on the treatment of young offenders, and what we should be doing about it. This thesis is developed here by two young forensic psychologists who recently obtained their Masters degrees from Maastricht University. FKCL has been very fortunate. We are to have their talented services, offered free of charge, for the next few months, looking at some of the problems we face in the UK. They are **Thea Johsefine Austevik** from

Norway and **Lara Schwarz** from Germany.

Sticking with the theme of prisons we have an inspiring article authored by **Nathaniel Peat**, Founder of **The Safety Box**, and **Shannon Jordan**, a young writer currently working with them. They present fine examples of what we might be doing in many other custodial institutions.

We also focus on long-standing yet ever more important issues – drug education, and how we stop our young people been drawn towards the false and dangerous temptations presented to them. No-one is better qualified to speak of this than **Fiona Spargo-Mabbs OBE**, Founder of the **DSM Foundation**, named after her son Daniel, whom she lost when he was just 16, after accepting the dangerous concoction that killed him. Ever since she has worked tirelessly to see that no other child suffers through a lack of knowledge about the dangers that may catch us unawares.

Sticking with schools and the work being done there, we have a piece from **Steve Sweeney** representing Safer School Partnerships and Schools Officers in the Metropolitan Police. The work these officers do needs to be better known. They stand so close to the issues that lie at the heart of the work that FKCL do. We have a piece from our new partners at **imabi**, who use the power of their inspiring new Apps to take the issues of the safety of our young people into every quarter of their lives – into schools, on the public transport system in London, into public places, and into the work place, offering technological solutions which help us all to keep safe. Their founder Mark Balaam, is working with FKCL to see how this work can be developed. Here, **imabi's** Operations Director, **Hayley Spedding** writes for us. We also have an update **Dr. Angela Herbert MBE** on the

wide range of activity and the ambitious yet successful outreach of the VCPB, and more exciting plans they have for their future.

Finally, to start 2023, we also welcome The Ben Kinsella Trust as new formal partners of FKCL. We could not ask for a better collaboration.

HELP CHANGE A LIFE TODAY. On the next page you will see FKCL's new "Print at Home" poster and flyer. Please download it here. You can download one in A4 or A5 format here at www.fightingknifecrime.london/media-assets. Please print one out and put it up somewhere useful. By using the QR codes, you will unleash the power of our partners Local Village Network's App and FKCL's wide range of resources to help young people find solutions to their lives.

Bruce Houlder

Founder of Fighting Knife Crime London (FKCL)



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Bruce Houlder



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Punishment or Rehabilitation? Comparing Two Countries – Is Norway Succeeding where the UK is Failing?

Lara Schwarz & Thea Johsefine Austevik

Both authors are Forensic Psychologists, having obtained their Masters degrees at Maastricht University

In Autumn 1994, five-year-old Silje Marie Redergård was found dead outside her home in Trondheim, Norway. Three children between four and six were blamed for the murder. A year previously, a similar case had unfolded in England. Two-year-old James Patrick Bulger was murdered by two 10-year-olds.

Both cases present shocking examples of children committing serious violent offences, yet their subsequent stories share little commonality.

The General Comment No. 24 (2019) on Children's Rights in the Child Justice System (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) recommends a minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR)

of at least 14 years. As the MACR is 15 years in Norway, the children in the Redergård case were not held criminally responsible and thus not charged with the murder. As part of this, they were shielded from the public and their identities were never revealed to the media. In the UK, the MACR is just 10 years, which is amongst the lowest in Europe. The children in the Bulger case were held in secure detention for nine months before being tried in an adult court, and sentenced to a Secure Children's Home, where they served eight years. The story spread around the world. The two children were subjected to extreme hostility from the public and the media throughout their trial and detention, even though children's identities should be protected from potentially dangerous publicity.

It has been almost 30 years since the events surrounding the Bulger case. So, we wonder - has the UK become better at dealing with young offenders who commit serious crimes?

In 2019, when he was just a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice, Edward Argar MP, opined that the UK had made "significant progress over the past decade" including publishing the "Standards for Children in the Youth Justice System". He is now the Minister responsible in the same department for Victims and Sentencing. He has a broad brief in areas which clearly need urgent attention.

The number of incarcerated young people in the UK has decreased in the last three decades. However according to a UNICEF report from 2020, the

juvenile justice system continuously fails to preserve children's rights and keep them safe. To illustrate this, in August 2022, 493 children between ten and 18 years are still institutionalized in England and Wales, with ethnic minorities being largely overrepresented with a ratio of up to 1:4 (Youth Justice Statistics: 2018 to 2019, Board³). School exclusions have also increased, as well as the use of segregation and solitary confinement in custody. Also, legal professionals continue to lack specific knowledge of youth justice and children's rights. This is alarming. An increase in the number of restraints or segregation in custody or care at one stage shown an alarming rise.⁴ More recently, in 2020, two of three Secure Training Centres were still deemed inadequate due to serious concerns related to untrained use of force and restraints, levels of violence, poor leadership, education, and healthcare provision.⁵

How could the UK improve its practices with young offenders who committed serious crimes?

To answer this question, it may be helpful to turn to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and recommendations by UNICEF. UN Article 37⁶ acknowledges that children and young people (anyone under the age of 18) are more vulnerable and possess different needs than adults due to their level of development. Therefore, when such a young person commits a crime, the arrest, detention, or imprisonment should only be used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate time. If a child is arrested, UN Article 37 further states that they must be separated from adult prisoners, treated with humanity and

respect, and in a manner that considers the specific age of the child. Whilst the UK clearly recognises these principles, all is not yet as it should be.

A recent evaluation of the British Criminal Justice System (CJS) by UNICEF recommends the UK to eliminate inhumane practices (such as solitary confinement, tasers, and spit-hoods), to increase the MACR and to preserve the young offenders' anonymity⁷.

All jurisdictions will encounter tension between the above-mentioned UN Convention and criminal justice principles, such as retribution, deterrence, and community safety. Taking the best interests of the child from a developmental perspective seriously can be at odds with traditional ideas of detention and punishment of criminal justice.

So, can the UK learn from its neighbours in the North in order to improve the handling of children and young people who have committed serious crimes? When comparing the UK and the Norwegian systems, major differences become apparent. One example relates to the fundamental principles that underly the jurisdictions. When custody at any age is seen as the only solution, the UK appears to favour principles such as retribution and deterrence, and the need for reform during time spent in custody appears less of a priority. In contrast, Norway only allows punishment in form of restricting a person's liberty, meaning that no other rights can be removed by the sentencing court. There, the guiding principles are normality and progression. That is, life inside the institution should resemble life outside as much as possible, and security levels in detention should be reduced gradually.

Even though the general number of sentenced children and young persons in the UK has decreased by 80% in the last decade, the proportion of custodial sentences in comparison to non-custodial sentences did not change over this period.⁸ Even more so, the length of sentences for young persons for indictable offences has been increasing over the last four years. We see today that children and young people convicted for indictable offences receive five months longer on average compared to ten years ago. Being deprived of family and friends will make resocialization more difficult. Indeed, two-thirds of young people surveyed said it was not easy for their friends and families to visit while in custody, further closing them off from their ordinary lives. Unfortunately, recent cases from the UK suggest that imprisonment may still not be fully respected as a "last resort". Serious questions are raised elsewhere in this magazine by two experienced and recently retired senior UK Circuit Judges about how courts in England and Wales sentence in cases of homicide, and on the lack of positive evidence of deterrence in the use of custody⁹.

In Norway, imprisonment of young people is seen as extremely negative in terms of healthy development. In the last decades, it has been a clear political goal to reduce the use of prison punishment for the youngest in society. Since the 2000s, the number of convicted young people has reduced notably, and much greater focus is given to what's in their best interest. It would be wrong to fail to acknowledge that there has been a marked reduction in the number of young people in England and Wales being sent to young offender institutions. Despite this, we suggest, there remains a difference of approach, and perhaps a need for

greater legislative imagination. Instead of sentencing young people to prison as a last resort, the relevant law in Norway states that prison should only be used as an alternative for when there is a *specific need for it*. Today, only a few young people serve a prison sentence in Norway. Instead of prison, alternative strategies are put in place.

For example, since 2014, two new penal sentences for juveniles have been administered by the National Mediation Service. Target groups are offenders between 15-18 years old at risk of recidivism and in need of follow-up. Alternatives to prison or community sentences are the so-called *Youth Punishment* (sex offences and robbery), which may last from six months up to a maximum of three years, and the *Youth Follow-up* (drug offences and violence), which may last from four months up to a maximum of one year. The contents of both these penal sentences have the same three components:

1. Restorative meetings/processes with the victims or others affected by the offence,
2. Tailor-made youth action plans for the period of the sentence, and
3. Signing and fulfilling this plan, supervised by a cross-sectorial follow-up team. During this time, the youth will continue to live with their families in society. If a penal case is successfully mediated and a signed agreement is fulfilled, the case is closed. More importantly, the case will not be visible on the offender's criminal record, and after two years, if the person did not commit another offense, the case must be expunged from their criminal record.

However, young people do receive custodial sentences in Norway, but these are limited to the most serious offences. In total, two institutions hold eight available places for youth (four for each). During the last few years, there has been an average of four to six young people per year serving prison sentences in Norway. Further, the conditions look very different than in the UK. The two specific institutions that were established to receive young offenders are characterised by a very high staff-prisoner ratio, and a cross-professional approach. For example, a 15-year-old girl serving a sentence for murder has a group of six professionals looking after her. Educational workers, psychologists, and healthcare workers collaborate closely to ensure that the youth receive the help and support they need. Importantly, the places are not categorized as prison cells, but rather as units.

One way to shed light on the success of the Norwegian as compared with the UK approach to young offenders is to look at recidivism rates. In the UK, young offenders released from custody had the highest reoffending rate compared to those who received non-custodial sentences, indicating that harsher punishment failed

to realise a central purpose of sentencing (see *Youth Justice Statistics: 2020 to 2021*¹⁰). In 2022, a report commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security concluded that life quality (e.g., completeness of education, health, and work opportunities) decreases as the harshness of punishment increases. Currently, Norway does not have enough data available to conduct statistical analyses on recidivism rates of young people. One reason for the low numbers is that most young offenders usually received only one sentence during their youth. Thus, drawing precise comparative conclusions on the consequences for the young offenders' future lives is not feasible. However, children and young people who are punished by *Youth Punishment* and *Youth Follow-Up* do receive close follow-ups and cross-professional approaches, with a focus on rehabilitation instead of incarceration. In comparison to custodial sentences, this approach will surely set the stage for the young person to better succeed later in life. For example, young offenders who are given sentences such as *Youth Punishment* are more likely to receive education and get employed later.

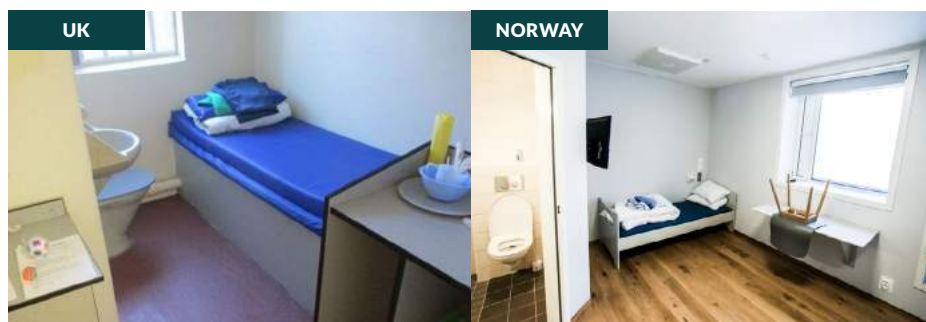


Figure 1: www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/local-news/wetherby-young-offender-institution-slammed-23410363

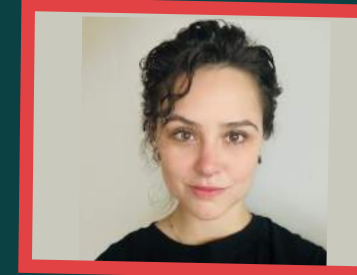


Figure 2: <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/i/kX5v/ungdomsfengselet-i-bergen-her-skal-15-aaringen-sone-straffen>

Today, we suggest that the UK cannot claim to be adhering fully to either the UN Child Convention or the UNICEF suggestions on the treatment of children or young people who commit crimes. In contrast, Norway adheres to these guidelines in a much more evident manner. At least we can say with certainty that harsher punishment does not improve the life circumstances young offenders are struggling with. Given the high recidivism numbers in the UK alone – putting aside the high costs for the child's well-being, there is much improvement to be made. The Norwegian approach seems more promising. There might be more to be learned from examining systems in other countries who have managed to get away from the kind of rhetoric that hinders real reform. While we may never be able to stop young people from committing violent crimes, we can influence how they are treated. How we respond to them may just make the difference in whether they will come out of the experience, and live a healthy fulfilling life, or whether they become entrenched in the system, destined to continue their criminal journey. Improving the way the criminal justice system in the UK deals with its young offenders is of utmost importance. Our view is that the UK might do well to use Norway as a good model for necessary adjustments in order to support troubled children and young people, to make them feel like they are equally worthy of returning into society and give them the opportunity to improve and become valued members of society. We also suggest that by so doing the UK might even save lives and decrease the ultimate damage to society caused by young offenders.

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- ¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-24-2019-childrens-rights-child>
- ² <https://www.unicef.org.uk/press-releases/uk-youth-justice-system-risks-breaching-childrens-rights-says-unicef-uk>
- ³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2018-to-2019>
- ⁴ <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2014/08/Looked-after-children-print.pdf>
- ⁵ See too <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmpubacc/30/report.html>
- ⁶ <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text> and see e.g. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rainsbrook-secure-training-centre-branded-inadequate-by-inspectors>
- ⁷ <https://www.unicef.org.uk/press-releases/uk-youth-justice-system-risks-breaching-childrens-rights-says-unicef-uk/>
- ⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2020-to-2021>
- ⁹ See articles in this edition by recently retired Old Bailey judges, His Honour Nick Cooke KC and Her Honour Wendy Joseph KC.
- ¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2020-to-2021>



Thea Johsfine Austevik



Lara Schwarz

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Violent Crime Prevention Board 4 Years On - Time for Change

**Dr Angela Herbert MBE, Chair of the Violent Crime Prevention Board,
Founder of Made on Purpose, and Director at IOTC Solutions**

The VCPB was a collaboration between a senior Metropolitan Police officer Dr Neville Lawrence OBE and a team derived from London's communities, most of which were already involved in working with police in some capacity.

In 2017, in a room at New Scotland Yard, senior police officer Mick Gallagher convened a team of influential community members and young people affected by violence to volunteer their time and consider ideas from their vast arsenal of knowledge, expertise and approaches to combat London's rising knife and violent crime.

Invited to lead the group was Dr Neville Lawrence OBE, father of Stephen Lawrence and Dr Angela Herbert MBE

originally appointed as vice chair and now holding the position of Chair.

The team with leadership of the Chair and Vice Chair, selected the identity of the Board and named it the Violent Crime Prevention Board, (VCPB), Vision to Champion Progress. The agreed focus of the Board was on providing youth with alternatives to crime, with the notion that if you remove a knife or action that is detrimental, an alternative must be provided. The hope is that young people could be provided with opportunities and support by the Board and other people of significance to be their biggest cheerleaders.

The Board identified a series of themes to strategically offer opportunities and support for youth as well as joining



up those providing youth support and positive activities. These included:

- Family
- Education
- Faith
- Business
- Youth
- Stop and Search - Police

Using these themes, the Board's role as the centre from which all themes emanate, would filter information between communities and the police in the main. The plan was for the Board to deliver and receive information from communities and consider how it might support the aims and objectives in London and beyond.

Activities over the past 4 years

- Collaboration with the Metropolitan police, Crimestoppers and other constabularies
- Presentations in educational institutions delivering prevention
- Videos and vignettes **Stand with the VCPB**
- Stop and Search - Stopwatch

- VCPB Awards – recognising organisations and individuals delivering supportive services to communities
- VCPB Ventures – entrepreneurial opportunities
- Supporting Kick Off @3 events
- Violent Crime Prevention Board Strategic Breakfast
- UCL Research
- Regular meetings with senior police
- Community Innovation Hubs
- Local police Basic Command Unit activities
- Food projects
- Personal charities
- VCPB Champions and Ambassadors

One of the VCPB ambitions in 2019 was to transfer the Board to young people so that they could lead with adult support from their perspective.

In 2022 reviewing the VCPB Board and activities over four years it was clear that members had committed their time and efforts, however the time has come to hand over the reins to the youth, not as a Board, but as a Community Interest Company. This will give them opportunities to apply for directorship role, secure funding and create jobs to achieve their identified goals. For young people, by young people, and champions for young people.

VCPB Member organisations will continue to deliver their services and offer their support as required:

- Courtney Brown, Father2Father - www.father2father.co.uk
- Jane Brueseka – Waltham Forest, Young Advisors - www.youngadvisors.org.uk/walthamforest

- Nims Obunge - Peace Alliance - www.thepeacealliance.org.uk
- Patrice Bailey – Patrice Bailey International - www.patricebaileyintl.com
- Jeremy Chapman – Sycamore Alliance Ltd - www.sycamorealliance.com/partner/sycamore
- Katrina French – Unjust CIC
- Andrew Morrison – Visions TV online
- Dr Angela Herbert IOTC- Solutions and Shades CJS CIC - www.iotc-solutions.com; www.madeonpurpose.org

Moving On – All Change - Introducing Lisa Westray Principle of Haringey 6th form college

An exciting new chapter is in progress, as we seek to register VCPB as a Community Interest Company with young people right at our core, leading in directorship roles with the support of Lisa Westray, Principle of Haringey 6th form college. Lisa engages with young people from across London and has supportive infrastructure that includes learning opportunities to enhance their business aspirations.

Launching in April 2023, the VCPB CIC will be led by young people for young people. They are being involved right from the outset of this exciting new phase, taking responsibility for defining the vision and identifying the priorities - It is critical for today's young people to have a voice in their own futures. New created leadership roles will give young people the opportunity to develop their professional skills. A wide range of experiences such as workshops, conferences, debate groups and other events will enable all young

people to have their voices heard on the issues that really matter to them.

The youth led VCPB will build a culture of belonging and inclusion that brings together a community of like-minded young people who will be a driving force for change. Members will continue to lend their support as needed to ensure that they actualise their aspirations.

Their first meeting took place on Saturday 10 December where they started discussions about the focus and approach of VCPB CIC. Currently, there is a survey being shared to increase the number of voices contributing to the approach.

If you have access to young people who might wish to get involved, please share the QR code with a few questions for them to complete and submit by 31 January 2023.

We are supporting young people to take charge of their space, as a vital aspect of Violent Crime Prevention.



For further information contact
Office@vcpb.org



Dr Angela Herbert MBE

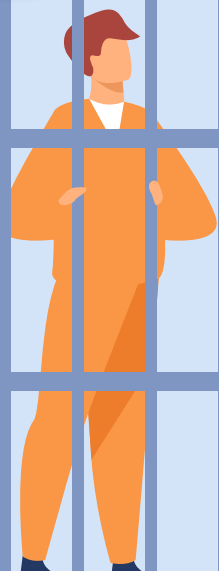


image: pdwvector - Freepik.com

Lifting from the negative into the positive

Shannon Jordan and Nathaniel Peat

At The Safety Box, we value empowerment strongly, especially for our young people. Being able to empower the youth of our community and let them know that they have the ability to achieve no matter their situation is something that we pride ourselves on. That empowerment was what was brought when The Safety Box delivered a Black History programme at HMP ISIS, and an Aspire Higher workshop at HM Youth Offending Institute Cookham Wood, a prison which we had not visited in over a decade.

HMP ISIS

On the 27th of October, a group of 8, from facilitators, to performers, attended the "Celebrating Black Excellence" event at HMP Isis. The session was led by CEO Nathaniel Peat, co founder of the Aspire Higher program ex-offender Christopher Syrus BEM, ex-gang member and ex-offender Leon McKenzie, Ruth Brown semi-finalist from The Voice, Reggae rising star Teshay Makeda, Property Investor and Millionaire Nikki Sutherland and social activist and rapper "2Badda" (Jason McLean).

The program was delivered to 40 young men within the prison, who were excited, interested and vibrant throughout the program.

Each young man was able to take away a valuable piece of knowledge from the personal stories given by Founder Nathaniel Peat, Chris Syrus BEM, ex-offender Leon McKenzie, and Nikki Sutherland. From Nathaniel Peat, they heard the message to never give up on their dreams, despite others' beliefs and that No only means no if you accept it to be a no. He inspired them that their beginning will not be their end if they Aspire Higher. Chris Syrus did a spoken word piece of poetry from his book that he wrote while serving a 10 year prison sentence and showed how he discovered his purpose as a way to encourage them too to have a purpose. Leon McKenzie gave a powerful account of perseverance after serving almost 16 years in prison. From Nikki Sutherland, they learned that their network is their net worth, and that the people we are around have an influence on where we go in life. Together, the knowledge left was impactful to every person sitting in that room.

Along with the motivational stories and personal experiences, we also were able to hear music from some amazingly talented and gifted artists. Teshay Makeda brought energy and vibrance with her reggae-driven sounds and inspirational lyrics, 2Badda hyped up the crowd with power fuelled by his activism-focused raps, which had the entire room in a dynamic state. Ruth Brown ended the event with a beautiful rendition, which had the young men in awe, sitting on the edge of their seats and completely taken back by her vocal ability..

When we ended, the young men were extremely passionate about what we had shared with them. They let us know how much we had changed their mindset and wanted more information on what we did. They left the room with smiles on their faces, and an excited disposition.

HM YOI Cookham Wood

The second programme was held at HM YOI Cookham Wood, for another group of young people. A group of 5 including Nathaniel Peat, Chris Syrus BEM, Leon McKenzie, Councillor Katy Thompson, the councillor for Waltham Forest, and Chris Preddie OBE attended to deliver our highly popular and flagship workshop "Aspire Higher". A select group of high-risk offenders attended the session, and they left the session having been greatly impacted by the message, and eager to speak to us longer.

Chris Syrus opened the session with his own personal story and a poem, highlighting the "3 steps to success." He expressed how he realised his purpose and how he actualized it into reality. One of the key points he left with the young people was the message to take the next step in front of you. That next step is seen as extremely vital, as you do not always know all the steps, but you can do the best to put one foot in front of the other towards your goal.

Nathaniel Peat's section was next, and as he relayed his personal journey, you could see the way that the young people became energetic and driven at what was said. They cheered at his successes and were inspired by his journey.

Leon McKenzie brought in the

relatability and vulnerability to the session, with his story of his life journey, as well as the reminder that you can change your story no matter how you begin. His personal story helped to solidify a rapport, and showed how not only you can become drawn into a situation without expecting it, but also how through perseverance and discipline, you can overcome that situation.

Councillor Katy Thompson came in next, sharing her experience as a young mother in East London, and how she became one of the youngest councillors of a London Borough at 25 years old. Her speech brought a connection with the young people due to their age and she showed how a simple desire to help and support people can bring you to interesting places that you never even imagined.

Chris Preddie OBE closed the session out with a humorous yet impactful anecdote of his life experiences. He brought humour and light-heartedness to the scene, engaging everyone who heard him. When the topic needed to be serious, however, his tone was just as engaging. His story taught an important lesson: that life can change in the blink of a moment, and you may never get back that particular moment in time, but what you do afterwards can have a major influence.

The difference between when these young people entered the room and when they left was astounding. They went from being highly talkative and joking around, to reflective, engaged and deeply interested, so much so that they wanted to stay and talk with our team for longer. The staff who were present with them also noticed the change, with one person

commenting that they had never seen a program bring such a drastic change in demeanour within the short space of time we spent with the young people in attendance. The positive impact was felt like a ripple effect all across the room.

Being able to interact with men, young adults and children who have entered the Criminal Justice System brings about an experience unlike any other. The young people we see always leave more engaged and enthusiastic than when they arrived. We focus our short programmes on developing a positive mindset, sharing valuable knowledge about self-development, confidence, purpose and goal setting. These small yet highly important pieces of knowledge that are given impacts the young people we work with more than we know.

When we visited HMP Cookham Wood a decade ago, we delivered a programme where over a year period, we were able to reduce the group violence in the prison by 96%. That impact was and still is not only never seen before in a British prison, but our impact was felt and is still remembered. When we returned years later, we encountered an individual who worked in the prison at the time we did the year-long programme, and even though he didn't remember our faces, he remembered the impact we left in the prison. He remembered how we changed the lives of particular individuals.

The way our Aspire Higher and Knife Prevention programmes work is that they focus on making these long-term, pivotal changes. For us, it is not just about teaching young people how to protect themselves against youth

violence, grooming, Child Criminal Exploitation, Child Sexual Exploitation, county lines, and knife crime, but it is about instilling mental changes. We work through the process of discovering your purpose, setting goals for yourself, and forming positive habits. We take these concepts deeper by looking at self-talk, how the mind works, finding out what you value, and self-defence skills to physically protect yourself from a knife. By working through role plays, demonstrations, personal stories, and our Aspire Higher workbook, we make sure to not just supply knowledge, but change a way of thinking. This is an in-depth process, but it is effective and impactful. Our young people leave with a better knowledge of themselves and their goals, and now they have the tools to go away and change their world for the better.

Our work speaks for itself. It resonates with the people we come in contact with. We bring the message of achievement against all odds, and showcase real experiences from people who have lived their stories. We use our own experiences because nothing is more impactful or inspirational than a personal story. We make sure to remind the young people that despite the situations that have gotten them where they are, they have the ability to make changes. One of our main messages is, "It's not about how you start, it's about how you finish," and that message echoes through every part of what we do. The messages and lessons we leave are timeless, and we continue to see the positivity that comes from what and who we've worked with daily. It is not just us, however. We are only planting the seed; and once that seed has been planted, it is our hope that each young person who has been powerfully

affected by it continues to remember the knowledge. We hope that they take that knowledge and use it to push them into the successful, fulfilling and happy experience they wish for themselves, whatever that may look like.

Shannon Jordan

Writer, Creative, and Advocate. Currently a content writer at The Safety Box CIC wrote this piece together with their founder,

Nathaniel Peat

is a Multi-Award Winning Entrepreneur, Patron, International Speaker (Inc TEDx), Business Coach, & Engineer. He is listed on the 2018 EMPOWER Financial Times List, the Black Power List, & The Financial Times Upstanding 100 BME Executive List. He currently sits on the Black Advisory Board for Lloyds Banking Group, & is Chairman of Brunel Business School and the EY Foundation.



Nathaniel Peat



Why all young people need good drug education

Fiona Spargo-Mabbs OBE

Why all young people need good drug education

When my younger son Dan was sixteen he asked if he could go to a party that evening with friends. He never came back. The policeman who knocked at the door in the early hours said he'd been found unconscious outside an illegal rave, miles away from our South London home. It was thought he'd taken ecstasy. We spent the next two days in intensive care, watching our bright, beautiful, big-hearted boy die from multiple organ failure. The little bag of MDMA he had taken was, it turned out, twelve times stronger than had caused fatality in the past. The four friends who had taken what had appeared to be identical amounts were fine - one of the risks inherent in an

illegal supply source, but a risk you may not fully appreciate as one of a bunch of teenagers out on a Friday night, with - it transpired - no drug education between them to help them out.

Dan's 'drug life' was something about which we as his parents knew nothing until after he died, but there wasn't a lot to know. His was a very short journey, starting with a puff of someone's weed at the after-prom party the summer before, a taste of a friend's MDMA at a gig in that autumn of year 12, some of his own that the same friend got for another gig a month or so later, and then that very unlucky last time, that worst case scenario ending. It's an ending that is, thankfully, not a common experience, but one which is totally, utterly avoidable

- along with all the other shades of harm and damage alcohol and other drugs can do. This of course includes so much more than the possible impact on physical and mental health, but all the collateral damage the criminality surrounding drugs wreaks on young lives, through violence, violation and exploitation. And while there remains a demand, the routes and methods of supply will continue to thrive, and to drive so much of this damage ever onward.

Demand for drugs will never disappear altogether, and the factors at play are complex, but it's certainly showing no signs of significant waning any time soon. Government data published this autumn shows that, by the age of fifteen, just over half of young people will have been offered illegal drugs, and almost one in three will have taken them, on at least one occasion (NHS Digital, 2022). This figure has hovered at roughly the same level for the last couple of decades. All we now know about the critical stage of neurological development the adolescent brain undergoes, from the age of around ten into the mid-twenties, highlights the fact that it's just at the stage of life when you're most likely to find yourself faced with decisions about drugs that your brain is least likely to help you manage those decisions safely.

Add to this mix all the multiple layers of essential social, hormonal and physical transformations taking place throughout adolescence, as a once-dependent child grows into an independent adult, and the results leave young people least able to manage impulse and risk, and to think things through sensibly, and most sensitive to social inclusion and exclusion. Without a sound understanding of the risks involved, and the skills and strategies to help them manage risk -

especially in a social context - young people are incredibly disadvantaged, and for some that doesn't end well.

When Dan died I didn't know any of this. Of course, I knew drugs were out there. We'd had 'drug conversations' at home, and we'd talked specifically about ecstasy just six months before he died, when he got back from Reading Festival full of the first time he'd seen people under the influence, and what that looked like. Dan was curious, and a chatterbox, so conversations weren't hard to come by, but I didn't know enough, and neither did he, to keep him safe when decisions came his way. So when he died I set out to learn what I wished I'd known, and to make sure other young people, and their parents and carers, and their teachers, were better armed than we had been, and started a drug education charity in Dan's name, the Daniel Spargo-Mabbs Foundation. I was too late to help Dan, but I was determined to do all I could to protect other young people.

It's been nine years now since Dan died and we started our charity, but the need for effective, evidence-based drug education for all our young people has never been greater. It's hard for them to avoid illegal drugs these days, whether it's 'In Real Life' or virtually, via a screen of some sort, not least social media, providing an ideal space to reach thousands upon thousands of young people, for buying and selling, as well as grooming and exploiting. And, in an era when young people's mental health is under enormous pressures, there's also the role drugs can play as a coping strategy, in that complex, chicken-and-egg relationship between mental ill health and substance use that is eons old. The government data referred to above also revealed that one in five



Dan Spargo-Mabbs

11-15-year-olds who had taken drugs had done so on the first occasion to forget their problems, the highest proportion on record (NHS Digital, 2022). The Mix recently published data on 16-25-year-olds that showed a similar concerning trend, with 21% reporting using drugs to escape from their problems in 2022, compared with just 12% the previous year (The Mix, 2022).

Reducing demand for illicit drugs is a key priority of the 2021 government drug strategy (and for parents and schools, as well as anyone working with, or caring for or about young people) and reducing – or even better, preventing – the harm they can do to young people is more important still. Drug education is vital if this is to be achieved in any way, shape or form. It's statutory now in all schools in England, but it can still be done poorly and partially, just to meet the curriculum. It's essential it is done well, and thankfully, there's an international evidence base that helps us to know what this looks like, because doing it badly can not only fail to help where it's needed, but can cause unintended, but very real harm. Failing to do drug education, and to do it well, leaves young people vulnerable, whoever they are, wherever they live, whatever family or community

they're from, across the full spectrum of harms drugs can cause.

Drug education won't fix all this, or address all that lies behind it, but without it we leave our young people seriously disadvantaged, and with a heavy potential price for some to pay.

Fiona Spargo-Mabbs OBE

Fiona Spargo-Mabbs OBE is Director and Founder of drug education charity the Daniel Spargo-Mabbs Foundation, and author of 'I Wish I'd Known - Young People, Drugs and Decisions: A Guide for Parents and Carers' (Sheldon Press, 2021) and 'Talking the Tough Stuff with Teens' (Sheldon Press, 2022)



Fiona Spargo-Mabbs OBE



DSM foundation
The drug education charity

www.dsmfoundation.org.uk

imabi



Hear from Mark Balaam, the Founder of imabi, and how his vision for social change is already making a difference.

After more than 20 successful years working in the telecommunications and digital solutions industries I decided it was time to give something back. As a father of two teenage daughters, Imogen and Abigail, I could see first-hand the challenges they faced with safely navigating their way through their childhoods with so much exposure to harmful online content and social pressure. So, in 2020 I created imabi, a company that is committed to using technology responsibly to make society safer for all, and in particular young people.

imabi's vision is to build a kinder society for everyone, everywhere. A world where people and organisations connect for a better understanding, creating safer communities and challenging harmful behaviour. And that by working together we educate and empower others to challenge and help shift social attitudes. Giving people, especially young people and other vulnerable groups, the confidence to speak up and get help is at the heart of imabi's mission to make sure everyone has that chance. It is only by knowing what is happening that action can be taken. And because of that, imabi is passionate about making sure everyone has the opportunity through access to their technology, imabi's technology platform supports a range of mobile applications and a content management system. These are available to users in a

variety of apps provided to them by their organisation. All of the apps give users access to trusted information, guidance, reporting and support tools – helping organisations start to tackle the root cause of issues by knowing what is happening. imabi's mobile apps are in use across businesses (Pro app), education settings (Inspire app) and communities (Railway Guardian – British Transport Police). imabi continues to develop products for wider public use and add new features, such as the soon to be launched geo-location service.

We know from experience and research that reacting to something when it has happened means it is too late. We have focused our energy into creating products that empower our users to make the right decisions for them, and reduce the risk of something harmful happening. Access to hundreds of guides ranging from street safety to home and online security, support groups and charities, important information and real time messaging about events means

users can be better prepared when making decisions. And, of course, should something happen they can report it. Planning a journey and staying connected with friends and families means users know someone is watching out for them; with the ability to discreetly send alerts if help is needed. imabi has everything all in one place. Supporting those who support their users is an important part of what imabi is about. We provide data analytics to organisations who adopt imabi products, giving them important anonymised trend data so they can better understand what is happening in their community. Access to the imabi content management system means they stay in control of what their users see in their app.

imabi has created products that work in any environment, and together they produce an ecosystem that starts to better understand the issues affecting people in their communities, and has established Social Value Programmes. By signing up to the imabi Partnership Programme groups of businesses, schools and local authorities can work together supplying the apps to their users and forming a local action partnership that tackles the root causes of harmful attitudes and behaviours such as violence against women and girls, knife violence and county lines.

"Railway Guardian is excellent. Being able to report any number of different situations so easily in an app means it's more likely that I will." Rail User

Ever wonder how technology can make a real

social impact?

"I worry when I'm out by myself and always tell friends the route I'm taking and the time to expect me home. Having geo-location is such a brilliant feature."

Employee – Large Corporation

imabi also offers businesses the opportunity to make a real and measurable social impact by sponsoring schools to have the imabi Inspire student app. Our imabi School Sponsorship Programme is open to all UK businesses and schools.

Our experienced team of professionals with backgrounds in policing, education, intelligence, safeguarding, telecommunications and digital solutions means we know some of the challenges people continue to face, and that by working together using responsible technology and innovation we can do so much more to make a real impact and drive social change.

imabi is committed to challenging the status quo because everyone has the right to feel safe, be safe and have a voice.

I wouldn't have spoken up about what happened to me without having access to the app. It meant I could report what was happening without having to do it face to face. I would have found that too difficult." Student – Inspire

Cut to the Quick

Her Honour Wendy Joseph KC

The hardest part about stabbing someone is to get the knife past the skin. After that there's no stopping it. It slips through the thin layer of fat, the muscle and – unless it hits bone – just keeps going. It will pass into whatever lies in its way – heart, lung, spleen. It will sever arteries and veins so blood pours into cavities where it has no business to be. It will leave organs to fail and collapse and die.

The knife is a lethal weapon. Except it isn't the knife that is lethal. The knife is, after all, an innocent tool in the hand that wields it. And it isn't the hand that is lethal either. It is the mind that guides the hand. It is the mind that chooses to take possession of the knife, to slip it into a pocket, a waistband, a sock. It is the mind that conjures up the will to pull out the knife and to use it.

And whose minds are they, that do these things? I ought to know, for in the 47 years since I was called to the Bar, in the 15 years since I became a judge, I have seen hundreds of killers, and the majority of them used a knife. They were mostly boys or young men under the age of 25. Only a small percentage of them set out to kill, but when the moment came, they did. One day they left their homes with their lives before them. They returned – if they ever returned – with everything changed. Most of them would spend all their foreseeable futures in prison. Not just years but decades. That's what justice in our society demands. But for each one of those who lost the life they had been living, another young person lost life entirely and forever. And there is no justice that can bring back the dead.

We all know what that means. Lives destroyed. Families torn apart and left bereft. Sentences get longer, but killers are not deterred. There is no reduction in knife crime. In fact it seems to be increasing. The number of fatal stabbings in the 12 months leading up to February 2019 was the highest since records began in 1946. 2021 was the worst year in London for teenagers knifed to death. More young people are locked up for more years than ever before – and still the killing goes on.

We haven't been able to stop it, and it's not for want of trying. There are many groups doing most excellent work trying to deter young offenders. Perhaps things would be even worse were it not for their efforts. But the simple fact is we haven't yet found solutions. Is it possible that this is because we haven't yet identified the problems. This short article doesn't pretend to do so, but it does try to stimulate some thoughts about why we are failing and what else we might try.

As I write – as you read – hundreds of young people are carrying blades ... everything from small kitchen knives designed for chopping carrots to machetes for killing animals. The latter, hunting knives, are frighteningly easy to get hold of on the internet. And they are horribly attractive. Children should not be able to buy them, but they can and do. It would be naïve to think that this is the cause of knife-carrying. It is even possible that the ready availability of such weapons is the result of people's willingness to arm themselves. Of course, efforts must be made to tackle this vile trade – but knives

of one sort or another are all around us, in our homes, in our work places, and they are not going away. It isn't the knives that are the problem, it's the carrying of them. That is already unlawful and has been for a long time, but the statistics suggest the law is little deterrence. So whilst we try to get hunting knives and machetes out of circulation, if we are to tackle knife crime, perhaps the better course is also to tackle the minds behind the crimes.

Let's look at those minds – and the reasons why those young people choose to carry knives. It will come as no surprise to anyone that there isn't a single or simple cause; but that isn't a reason to give up on the analysis. If there are multiple causes then we must find multiple solutions.

From the Bench – and this is of course only one perspective – it looks very much as if there are three main groups of young people carrying knives. There are

1. most dangerous of all, those who enjoy the carrying of knives because it gives them power. It isn't, perhaps, so much the power to hurt that attracts, as the power to make others fear them, defer to them, give them what might be perceived as respect. It is this power that they crave. They feed on how it makes them look to others.
2. the second group are those who associate with the first. They want to belong with those whom they see as powerful. As long as the power that comes with knife-carrying is seen as attractive, they will do it too.
3. The third group are those who are plain afraid. All around them are those who carry knives and create a threat; and they see no way of standing up to the threat than by carrying knives themselves.

If this is right – or even partially right – it looks very much that, if the first group evaporated, so would the second and in turn the third.

If the first group didn't gain respect and deference from knife-carrying, they wouldn't feel big. If they didn't feel big, perhaps they wouldn't do it. But how to get rid of the knife as an image of power? How to create the belief in young people that the carrying of knives isn't a sign of strength but of weakness; that it is a cowardly and despicable thing to do; that there is nothing admirable in hiding behind a blade? Education, of course. And at the youngest possible age. It is a simple proposition that a three-year old can understand. If someone hurts them, that is bad. And if they hurt someone else, that is bad too. Neither should happen because hurting people is wrong.

And the strange thing is that most three-year olds already understand this. It is somewhere along the difficult path from infancy to puberty, from dependence to independence, that our children lose their way. Somewhere in this time, as they begin to think about who they are and what they might be, too many of our children make the choice not to behave in accordance with the rules which our society has set down for the security and comfort of all.

In Isis, a prison on the east side of London for inmates aged 18-25, over 50% of inmates claim to belong to a gang. The vast majority of these will have offended in the context of that gang affiliation. That affiliation isn't a declaration of wanting to behave against the law – it's a declaration of wanting to behave against our law. My experience of gang culture isn't that it is lawless, but that gang members are behaving in accordance with different laws, different loyalties to that of the rest of society.

Does it behove us to ask why? Perhaps it does, because if our society was working for these young people, why would they be so anxious to turn their backs on it. If they saw bright and confident futures in it, why would they reject it. Is it that those who join gangs, who choose to carry knives, who elect to reject the laws that should bind us all are those who in some way we have turned our backs on?

Here are some startling and sad facts. In our prisons over 50% of inmates have a reading age of a young primary school pupil. Being functionally illiterate in our society makes your life very, very difficult. At one end of the scale, it deprives you of the ability to do everyday tasks; at the other to explore this world and others, to learn to empathise with how other people think, to make your mind bigger. Many of these young people will have been excluded from school and no other sort of education put in place for them. Here's another sad fact. Those brought up in care, those sexually or physically abused in their formative years, those with any sort of adverse childhood experiences are markedly over-represented in the dock and in custody.

None of these things are coincidences. Those who feel misunderstood, excluded, and shut out from the benefit of belonging to our community are likely to look for another community to belong to. Of course, there are many, many young people who face all these problems without offending, and who overcome hardships that would break many of us, and yet they go on to lead admirable lives. And of course, facing hardship doesn't excuse wrongdoing – but it might help explain why some youngsters behave as they do. And it might help the rest of us understand how to help them which is – in the long run – to help ourselves.

There are no magic solutions. But a recognition that everyone in our society is in it together, and that we all deserve and owe each other respect. And then this: the message delivered constantly to all our children from their earliest years that hurting people is wrong, and that the carrying of knives does not command respect but entirely the opposite; that it is despicable.

Unhappily, this isn't a problem that we will solve overnight because it has to do with changing mind-sets. But happily, mind-sets can be changed. It requires the determination and resources of government – but not only of government. We can all play our part. And if we do, this is a battle that can be won.

Her Honour Wendy Joseph KC

Her Honour Wendy Joseph was called to the Bar in 1975, became a QC (now KC) in 1998 and a Circuit Judge in 2007. She became a Senior Circuit Judge at the Old Bailey in 2012 and remained there until her retirement in March 2022. Her first book 'Unlawful Killings' was published by Penguin Random House in June 2022.



Her Honour Wendy Joseph KC



Image: The Old Bailey: The Central Criminal Court in London

Modern Trends In Sentencing - A Personal Perspective

His Honour Nicholas Cooke KC

In this article, I only scratch the surface and the views expressed are my own alone. This is not an academic piece of writing, just some thought-provoking observations.

I was involved in the criminal law as a barrister and judge between 1977 and 2019. Since 2021, I have been researching into sentencing for murder. Research is a welcome change. I always wanted to think critically about the law, not just apply it. For many years after I started at the bar, sentencing was a case-specific, subjective matter. There was no appeal against what was thought to be a lenient sentence and appeals against severity could only succeed if a sentence were found to be wrong in principle or manifestly excessive. The latter phrase was interpreted strictly.

The offender focused approach to sentencing has now largely disappeared, displaced by guidelines which are closely followed. For murder, the mandatory life sentence remains, with, since 2003, statutory starting points, excluding the possibility of parole, increased, with effect from 22 June 2022, to 14, from the original 4. That provides an illustration of how the governments have increasingly sought to manage or micromanage sentencing over the last 20 years. The move to guidelines and starting points brought with it benefits in terms of consistency. However, the law of unintended consequences, if that is not too charitable an attribution, has meant that both the independence of the judiciary and of individual judges has been

reduced. That matters, as does the fact that judges no longer feel so personally responsible for their sentences. With many of the judges of my early career, that burden of responsibility operated as a moderating influence. There was no escaping the fact that the judge, with no “superior orders” to hide behind, was doing something potentially dreadful to a fellow human being. I do not believe that those on a committee, deciding upon guidelines can feel the same. That comment also applies to politicians when they legislate.

Traditionally sentencing had overlapping objects: retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation, public protection, and the avoidance of vengeance or social unrest by ensuring acceptance of the penalty that the state imposes. Addressing those aims whilst avoiding costly – in financial and human terms – consequences has always been difficult. The politicisation of sentencing and a change in media accessibility and emphasis has modified and increased the practical importance of the fifth aim, pushing it towards penal populism.

Retribution

The weight given to retribution has varied. It now has more prominence than it did during the great majority of the twentieth century, when the focus was firmly on rehabilitation. I mentioned earlier the pleasure of research. That has involved discovering material of which I was unaware. For example, this extract from the Report of the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment 1948-1953:

‘52. Modern penological thought discounts retribution in the sense of vengeance. Lord Templewood went so far as to say that recently “the reforming element has come to predominate and that the other

two (objects of sentencing - deterrence and retribution) - are carried incidentally to the reforming element” Sir John Anderson attached greater importance to deterrence but agreed in excluding retribution: “There is no longer in our regard of the criminal law any recognition of such primitive conceptions as atonement or retribution. We have over the years fortunately succeeded to an exceptionally large extent, if not entirely, in relegating the purely punitive aspect of our criminal law to the background.”’

Lord Templewood (formerly Sir Samuel Hoare) was a Conservative politician and Sir John Anderson a National Independent MP. Both served as Home Secretary. One would not associate such words with the current or recent Home Secretaries.

There are a number of reasons why retribution has acquired such prominence. I would suggest, the politicisation of sentencing, the perceived or actual failure of rehabilitative sentences to deliver, and a decline in the ethical or religious value attached to forgiveness. The Labour Party, historically identified as the party of penal reform and rehabilitation, abdicated that role decades ago, keen to be seen as “tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime” (A Labour Party slogan from 1993). It quickly, and has consistently, proved, irrespective of party, easier to promise the former than to deliver the latter.

Deterrence

Next, deterrence. Those who commit a crime and fail to be sentenced have not been deterred. What is aimed at is the deterrence of others. The law-abiding public tends to believe deterrence works and increased sentences will deter more effectively. Both propositions are questionable. In 2003, when starting points for sentencing murder were introduced, the adult starting point,

for murder by firearm, was 30 years. For murder by stabbing, the starting point was 15 years. In 2008, after Ben Kinsella’s murder, there was an understandable demand to address the disparity just referred to. A 25 years starting point was added, with respect to killings with a weapon taken to the scene, the government stating it believed that would have influence on deterrence. What happened? The answer is that the percentage of “sharp instrument” killings (the term used in the relevant table) remained virtually constant, 37.34% in 2010, 38.34% over the subsequent decade (Source, Worksheet 7: Number and percentage of offences currently recorded as homicide, by apparent method of killing and sex of victim, Homicide in England and Wales: Year Ending March 2021, Appendix Tables). Of course, the argument exists that but for the increase in the starting point such killings would have spiralled out of control, but does that argument convince? Now, after Ellie Gould’s murder, referred to below, there is a growing call to address, by increased sentences, the disparity between “weapon to the scene” and “weapon available at the scene” murders. Will that have any effect in reducing the number of such murders? I doubt it.

Public Protection

Next, public protection. It was the Criminal Justice Act 2003, which also brought in starting points for murder, that the sentence of Imprisonment for Public Protection was introduced. That sentence illustrates just how wrong legislative decisions on sentencing can be. The sentence is indefinite, with a minimum tariff specified before release on licence may be sought. Attempting to strike a balance between public protection and

fairness to a defendant via an indefinite sentence, triggered by a mechanistic process involving reference to a very wide list of types of previous conviction, was to embark on a doomed undertaking. Judicial discretion as to the imposition of the sentence was very substantially excluded, and with it, personal judicial responsibility, and the contribution of judicial experience. Having been brought into force in 2005, the project began to unravel almost immediately. In 2008 the ‘trigger’ provision was amended, although, consistently with the usual rules, not retrospectively, so as to alter these provisions to prevent them operating, absurdly, in cases where the tariff would be less than two years. Imprisonment for Public Protection was then abolished, but again, consistently with the normal rules, not retrospectively, in 2012.

The malign legacy of Imprisonment for Public Protection continues. Lord Brown, a Supreme Court Justice between 2009 and 2012, has described the sentence in these terms as the “the greatest single stain on our criminal justice system”. I would, humbly, agree, although I would add, jointly with the miscarriage of justice cases of the 1970’s and 1980’s which inspired me to want to become a judge.

Hopefully, the House of Commons Justice Committee’s recommendations (28 September 2022) will be accepted, and the continuing nightmare of Imprisonment for Public Protection dealt with properly, although, the signs are not hopeful. The usual rules against legislating retrospectively are not apposite to deal with such a legislative error, as the responsible Home Secretary, Lord Blunkett has now recognised this to have been. So far, 74 of those serving this sentence have committed suicide.

Rehabilitation

I move on to rehabilitation. Successful rehabilitation is the Holy Grail of sentencing policy, but a shift towards an objective, more retributive approach makes it harder to achieve, and recidivism remains stubbornly high. Longer sentences and more crowded prisons hinder rehabilitation, as has long been recognised. If there is under investment, the problems are exacerbated.

Again, it is worth quoting a Conservative Home Secretary, Lord Brooke of Cumnor (formerly Sir Henry Brooke):

"It is believed, and I have no reason to doubt it, that few people have enough resolution to endure more than ten years' confinement in normal prison conditions. The longer a man is kept in after that the less fit may he be ever to be released".

At present, we seek, rightly I think, to combine deterrence in the sentence of the court with efforts to develop a prison regime which will produce in a person, at the end of his term of imprisonment, fitness to live free. This has been possible hitherto because of the scarcity of very long terms of imprisonment. Last year, I inquired in the Home Office how many prisoners we had in prison who had actually been serving for more than ten years on end. The answer was that, apart from mental cases in Broadmoor, who are in a category by themselves, there were only six, and one or two of those were there because they were on the mental borderline, and it seemed that they could hardly safely be let out.' (Hansard 21 December 1964, Columns 911-912)

Prison conditions have improved considerably, although not by as much as those without first-hand knowledge of those conditions today might think. However human beings have not changed and the adverse effects of long-term

incarceration itself remain the greatest threats to rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

The treatment of young offenders was an area where rehabilitation was pre-eminent. From 2003, for those under 18, a 12 year starting point applied to all convicted of murder. By amendment, in 2022, a sliding scale of starting points for young offenders aged between 10 and 17 replaced that. That scale substantially increased sentences at the middle and upper end of the age range. Our old friend, the law of unintended consequences, is likely to ensure that this change will result in longer sentences for younger offenders generally. This change in the law was, like so many, prompted by a media campaign and a high profile case, the murder of Ellie Gould. Sadly, the target was the wrong one. If the sentence which was imposed in this case was too low, then the cause was the substantial distinction in starting point between murder by stabbing with a knife taken to the scene, 25 years, and murder by stabbing with a knife which was available at the scene, 15 years. When the family campaigning for a change in the law in this case realised that the proposed change in young offender starting points would have no effect upon sentence in a case like the one which had affected them so terribly, they dissociated themselves from the proposal. The introducer of the provision in parliament did not mention deterrence at all. The justifications offered were an increase in predictability and transparency and a reduced dependence on judicial discretion. There was no significant parliamentary opposition to this change in the law. It will indeed reduce judicial discretion, not only for young offenders, but for young adults who, conventionally, were able to benefit from mitigation on the basis that it was

appropriate to recognise that a defendant was only marginally over the threshold and into a much more severe sentencing regime. That argument has now gone in murder cases, and I would expect it gradually to lose its force elsewhere, such is the anticipatable effect of a change at the top of the penological scale.

There are other aspects of modern sentencing which cause me concern. For example, the failure to address femicide and the prevalence of offending against women adequately, and the failure to reduce the over sentencing of secondary parties in relation to serious crimes. I fear, from my own experience, that combined with the high starting points applicable in such cases, this phenomenon, along with issues about racial discrimination, robs the criminal justice system of legitimacy in the communities most affected by gang violence. That reinforces the code of silence that makes the detection of perpetrators so difficult. In its end result such extremely high sentences may therefore reduce rather than enhance the hoped for general deterrent effect.

The broadcasting of sentencing defendants has now begun. Here too I am worried. Is there a risk that this will, because of the choice of cases to be broadcast, increase the demonisation of defendants and fuel sentence inflation, with no practical benefit? I am all in favour of making the criminal justice system and the sentencing process more transparent, but the selective exercise evidenced so far seems to me to be the wrong way forward – and as the reader will by now realise, I am haunted by the law of unintended consequences!

It was suggested to me that the elimination of judicial discretion in sentencing was necessary because the judiciary was drawn from so limited a

background that a subjective element had to be taken out of the process. I wasn't from that stereotypical background and nor were many of my colleagues and empathy came from more than background. If that was a driving force then I am worried that the medicine may have been as or more damaging than the disease. And for what it is worth, my experience convinces me that higher detection rates and speedy, fair, and more local justice does more than constantly increasing sentences to make society safer.

His Honour Nicholas Cooke KC

His Honour Nicholas Cooke KC was called to the Bar in 1977 and took silk in 1998. He was appointed the Recorder of Cardiff and a Senior Circuit Judge in 2007 and was an Additional Judge at the Central Criminal Court between 2012 and 2019. He also sat as a Deputy High Court Judge of the Queen's Bench Division and a Judge of the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division). He is presently reading for a D.Phil. at Worcester College, Oxford University.



His Honour Nicholas Cooke KC



He said, 'When I have nothing, being part of the gang gives me something'.

Hayley Spedding, retired senior police officer, previous Multi-Academy Trust CEO, current Operations Director at imabi

Many years ago whilst serving as a police officer I was called to investigate a serious assault in a small, quiet village. The victim was a prominent member of the local community and the wider Bangladeshi community in London and had been specifically targeted. While

interviewing one of the young suspects he turned to me and said that I could never understand what it was like to grow up in London with no prospects, no strong family support and feeling on the outside of society looking in. He explained to me that being part of a gang gave him a sense of belonging, a sense

of purpose and a sense of community. He said when he had nothing, being part of the gang gave him something. He was 17 years old. Those words have stayed with me. They gave me an insight into the strong bonds that bind young people in gangs, and the lengths they will go to, to be with people who give them the sense of being someone who matters. The child I spoke to was willing to inflict very serious harm on an innocent man who was unknown to him, and who was very lucky not to die that night.

Fast forward 21 years and where is society? We are still facing the same challenges in tackling youth violence

and knife crime. Yes, it's a complex set of social factors that enable these problems, some of the young people are victims themselves of fear, coercion, exploitation and grooming; and yet here we are – knife crime is still endemic. It feels little progress has been made on a macro scale to make a sustainable change.

We read about the success stories, the hard work and commitment of individuals and community groups, the funding (and withdrawal of funding) and yet we barely go a day without reading about yet another tragedy brought around by knife crime. As a parent of two boys, one of whom lives

in London, I worry about their safety. As a retired police officer, I have seen first-hand how tragedy can come calling without warning, and the legacy it leaves in families and the wider community. It is hard not to be affected by those experiences long after they have happened, and to always want to do more to protect the public from harm.

In 2020 I was approached by the founder of imabi, Mark Balaam, who invited me to join his technology company on a mission to drive social change and increase social value through responsible technology. Having developed a digital platform and a range of mobile applications with features designed to improve access to support, guidance, messaging, reporting and safe havens, Mark's vision is to make his technology accessible and available in any environment to empower and educate people so they can make better choices and feel confident to speak up. Now operating in schools, businesses and across the national rail network, imabi is at the start of its journey to truly make a difference, especially to young people. One of the reasons we are delighted to be partnered with Fighting Knife Crime London is the added value we believe we give to the work they are already doing helping all young people in London find pathways to safety, and embracing the use of technology to achieve this.

Schools adopting the imabi Inspire app are able to publish information and guidance to their pupils on any topic, from street safety to awareness of online grooming, county lines and exploitation. As well as information on wellbeing, active lifestyles and healthy relationships. Providing access to

trusted information, and giving them a voice to report concerns 24/7 means we can make available really important information on a large scale in real time, and we start to educate and empower this generation of young people to become responsible, confident adults of the future. We know these are small steps, but they are important ones to take in transforming how young people access information and use technology responsibly to give them a voice. As a Deputy Head teacher of an inner city school said to me, 'if we change one child's life it has been worth it'. I agree, but let's change more.

Hayley Spedding

Operations Director at imabi,
FCKL's new partner

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Hayley Spedding



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Safer School Partnerships and Schools Officers in the Met Police

PC Steven Sweeney BSc(Hons), MSc - Continuous Policing Improvement, Youth Policy Team, Metropolitan Police Service

Since the 1980's, poor discipline and unruly pupil behaviour within schools has become a prominent public and political issue in England and Wales. The Professional Association of Teachers asked the Prime Minister to set up a committee of inquiry to look at discipline in schools. In 1987, Lord Elton was appointed to chair the inquiry. However, in 1995,

the murder of head teacher Philip Lawrence by a 15 year old pupil from a nearby school created debate on the need to provide better security in and around schools, and ultimately led to a pilot of the Safer School Partnership (SSP) programme to provide a new policing model for schools. The Met Police deployed 100 police officers across 10 London boroughs with a high

rate of youth offending, truancy and anti-social behaviour (ASB). It provided a focused approach to address the high level of crime and ASB committed, both by and against children and young people, in and around schools.

An SSP is a formal agreement between a school (including Colleges and Universities) and the police to work together to keep young people safe, reduce crime and the fear of crime in schools and their communities. An SSP is a positive way for the police and schools to demonstrate their commitment to promoting a safe environment to learn and prevent crime. This involves a police Safer Schools Officer (SSO) regularly working at a school or across a number of schools on a full time or part time basis. In London, an SSP requires a signed SSP protocol and Data Sharing Agreement (DSA) so that everybody understands the aims and their responsibilities.

I started working as an SSO in 2010, about a year after every borough in London finally ran a Safer Schools team. Before then, while on response team, every young person I encountered had a bad attitude and proved difficult to communicate with so I expected the same, and I was reluctant to accept the role, but it soon became my favourite area of policing. At that time there were 189 SSOs and 102 PCSOs on Safer Schools teams in London, although in 2011 PCSOs were withdrawn in order to match Police officer resource to demand. Since then, in respect of SSPs and youth based policing, I have been involved in the development of the 2012 'new Met model' and the BCU model in 2017. The work we did on the Met Central Youth Policy team brought

about closer working between SSOs, Volunteer Police Cadet coordinators and the new role of Youth Engagement and Diversion Officer.

Since 2012, the Met has dedicated more resources and investment in policing for young people, going from 189 to 370 SSOs. In my view, these decisions are absolutely right to improve confidence in the police, build stronger relationships with young people and bring about positive change in young people's lives to safeguard them from exploitation and divert them from a life of criminality. However, the guidance was open to interpretation, therefore, I worked on the transformation of the aims and key roles and responsibilities within an SSP to make it clearer for everyone involved in SSPs. The aims of a SSP are:

- Provide positive **engagement** to build trust and **confidence** between the school community (young people, school staff and parents) and the police;
- Improve **safety** and enhance **safeguarding** within the school and wider community;
- Develop strategies which disrupt experiences of victimisation and future involvement in crime;
- Deliver early **intervention** and **diversion**, promoting positive pathways for young people.

In line with the Police and Crime Plan 2022-2025¹, the Met Police offers targeted support to secondary schools to tackle high-risk, high-harm criminality that affects young people and ensure young victims are supported and the most vulnerable are safeguarded. However, there are not enough SSOs in the Met to form

an SSP with every secondary school in London, so Safer Schools Teams have to prioritise where SSOs are deployed to ensure schools can get the most from them. The SSP model allows for flexibility in its approach so each school or cluster of schools may want to develop an SSP that best reflects its needs and circumstances. However, all will share the same aims with the same outcomes of keeping young people safe and preventing crime.

Due to the nature of the role, the SSO is alone most of the time; communicating with academics, young people, their families and everyone else between. Therefore, the role requires a high level of communication skill, experience, and a depth in knowledge of specific police powers not required in other roles within the police. Research on the relationships between the police and schools shows the main attributes of a good SSO are categorised as follows:

Ability

- Good communicator (includes confidence, approachability and diplomacy with school staff and young people)
- The right sort of person (includes common sense, being fair, a desire to work with young people and invested in achieving good outcomes for young people)

Knowledge

- Possess a range of policing experience (possess a wide knowledge of policing processes and practices)
- Knowledge of school policies and procedures

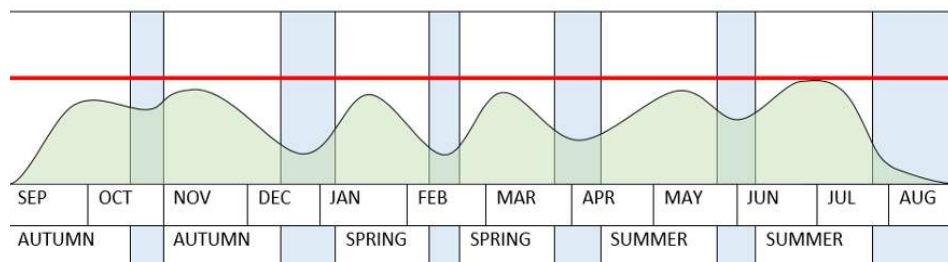
The main benefit of the role is in allowing the SSO discretion when dealing with incidents so the best outcomes can be achieved for all young people involved without criminalising them. SSOs will tackle emerging crime related issues through early intervention, preventative education, restorative approaches and diversion rather than by entry into the criminal justice system.

Therefore, throughout the year SSOs will provide continual focus on four key areas, discussed below.

- Reducing and preventing serious youth violence
- Increased trust and confidence
- SSO's support to young victims
- Protecting young people from exploitation and harm

The first of these aims is achieved through a variety of activities, including high visibility after school patrols, including the School Watch scheme to create safer passages and reassure students after school. Research shows the key times when children and young people are most vulnerable to becoming a victim of crime and when crimes are likely to be carried out. A general youth related crime pattern (under 16's with peak ages for criminality starting at 14 years old, committing *Robberies, thefts & theft type offences, and Serious Youth Violence*) correlates to term times throughout the academic year with a pronounced fall in the level of offences during school holidays. The peak times are between 1500-1700 hours during term time. While the peaks and troughs vary in volume year on year, the pattern remains consistent - crime peaks during term time and dips during school holidays.

Fig 1



It is clear that early intervention and diversion is essential to prevent young people from committing crime later in life. In Fig.1, the Sep-Apr the peaks are near the beginning-mid term and during the summer term the peaks are near the end of term.

SSOs also assist schools in arranging screening operations and weapons sweeps at those key times to build a picture regarding weapons carriage and storage and prevent serious youth violence. SSOs also deliver presentations and workshops on consequences of bad behaviour, as well as facilitate preventative education.

In an effort to **increase trust and confidence** SSOs are involved in youth panels, open days, parents evening, professional development days, etc. and increase engagement with parents. They also share information with schools on matters that affect the safety of the school community.

Furthermore, SSOs **support young victims** by organising follow up meeting with pupils that are victims of crime to provide reassurance and crime prevention advice. Similarly, they identify emerging trends and work with schools to **protect young people from exploitation and harm**. This involves

identifying pupils on the cusp of criminal activity and providing early intervention and refer them to diversion schemes and activities such as the VPC. Overall, the role of a SSO is challenging but rewarding and worthwhile and I really enjoy my work improving the role helping SSOs provide a good service for schools and young communities.

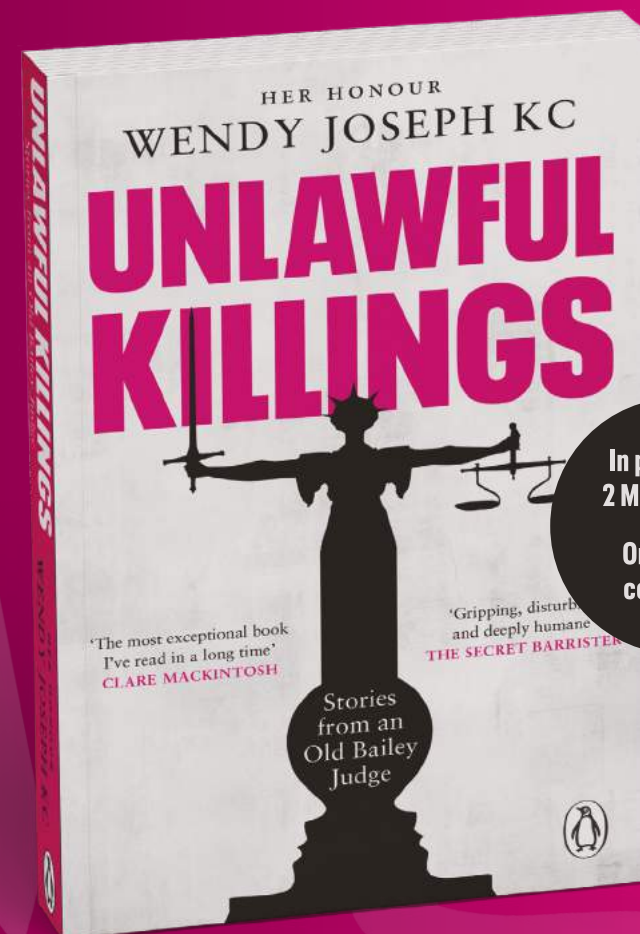
References:

¹ this report can be found in FKCL's resources section, and also at <https://www.london.gov.uk/mopac-publications/londons-police-and-crime-plan-2022-25>

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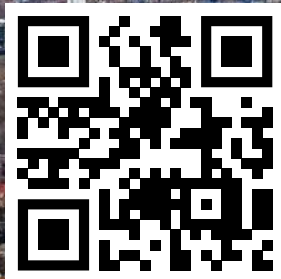
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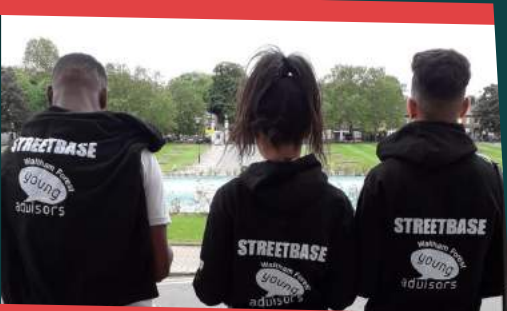
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