

The background image is a composite. The top half shows a city skyline at night, with the London Eye visible on the right. The middle section features a large railway bridge with multiple tracks, illuminated by city lights. The bottom section shows a crowd of people silhouetted against a bright light source, with their arms raised in celebration or protest. The overall tone is dramatic and urban.

# FIGHTING KNIFE CRIME

*Issue 10 - January 2024*



*[www.fightingknifecrime.london](http://www.fightingknifecrime.london)*



# 'Being Greater than Ourselves'

FKCL presents its first major London Conference

TUESDAY MAY 14<sup>TH</sup> 2024,  
London Congress Centre

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“

I applaud Fighting Knife Crime London for seeking to harness effective collaborations. Together we really are stronger, and will save lives.

Annie Lennox

”

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Alive to the challenges involved, let's come together to share best practice, and as a coordinated and pragmatic engine of change. Let's learn together how to eradicate the lure of gangs and the proliferation of drug related crime, and make London once again a place where our young can be proud to live, and be free from fear.



Issue 10

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NOTE: All references and footnotes have live links to enable greater research. Our signposting poster on page 18 gives immediate access to our own resources as well as those of Local Village Network. Please download it [here](#) and print at home.

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# Foreword

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

2023 has been a year to remember. Sadly, we have to report some 21 teenagers were killed in 2023, 18 being stabbed, two being shot and one killed when his moped was struck by a car. You can read some details [here](#). It is a higher tally than 2022 but fewer than 2021. These figures provide no cause for the slightest complacency. They are terrible figures, and no comparative snapshots can make them seem less serious. Many families and friends now

grieve for these young lives lost, and for what?

The year for FKCL ended well. In November we became strategic partners with the Met for their bi-annual Operation Sceptre knife crime and community engagement campaign. These saw 6000 leaflets with information about our resources distributed across London. We are also in the process of moving out from the charitable umbrella of that great

organisation and main partners at **Catch22** who have supported us since inception. We are happy that they will retain a link however via our future trusteeship. In a few months we should become our own separate charity (CIO). This should be a reality by the time of our first **annual conference "Being Greater than Ourselves"** at the **Congress Centre in London on Tuesday May 14th**. This is an exciting moment and there will be some big announcements in the next few weeks and months. Follow it [here](#) and book your delegate pass now!

This month's magazine looks at a broad range of subjects. **Sandra Jareno-Ripoll**, **Elizabeth Paddock** and **Professor Kevin Browne**, from the Centre for Forensic and Family Psychology, at the School of Medicine, University of Nottingham unveil their new research into the complex landscape of knife crime. A **Prison officer** (who for now must remain anonymous) gives some fascinating insights, which will amaze. **Sammy Odoi** the inspiring CIO of Wipers Youth CIC speaks about the importance of youth work. **Deanna Heer KC**, Senior Treasury Counsel and the lead for the Criminal Bar Association on knife crime writes for us as well about how the law can make things very difficult for knife offenders. **Niven Rennie**, former head of the Scottish VRU and now Chair of the Hope Collective brings his huge experience to bear on how we should move forward together, which is very much the theme of our forthcoming conference. **Joseph Lyons**, CEO of the West Ham Foundation speaks about the inspiring work they do every day of the year with young people. **Chief**

**Inspector Rob Ranstead**, lead for the Metropolitan police in London for Operation Sceptre also writes for us about what their work has achieved, and how this is measured. Finally, my own first magazine piece here is based on a speech delivered in November as part of Operation Sceptre week at **Lambeth Town Hall**. Please forgive it's length, but it serves as a bit of a tour d'horizon of the problems we all we face in London, and how we might change things for the better.

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

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**Bruce Houlder**



# Unveiling the Complex Landscape of Knife Crime: Insights, Challenges, and a Call to Action

By Sandra Jareno-Ripoll, Elizabeth Paddock and Kevin Browne, Centre for Forensic and Family Psychology, School of Medicine, University of Nottingham

**I**n November 2023, a Parliamentary Briefing was held to discuss the findings of the Knife Crime and Youth Violence Think Tank Report and a Systematic Review on the topic. This briefing aimed to engage Members of Parliament and peers in a discussion about the lessons learned in addressing knife crime and to create a call to action for the government to prioritise effective strategies for reducing and preventing knife crime in the future. A forensic psychology team from the University of Nottingham Medical School, consisting of Professor Kevin Browne, Dr Elizabeth Paddock and Trainee Sandra Jareno-Ripoll presented the

outcomes of an International Think Tank on Knife Crime and Youth Violence, which included a report with recommendations from the think tank and a systematic review of knife crime evidence.

Knife Crime is defined in British law as crime involving a knife or sharp object, such as carrying the weapon with intent to harm, or using it to threaten or hurt others. In 2018, knife crime reached a nine-year high with over 4500 recorded offenses committed by individuals under 18. Although this increase can be partially explained by better police practice at recording such crimes, self-report data has highlighted that a large proportion

of knife carrying goes undetected and thus may be more common than is reflected in official statistics. In the United Kingdom, knife-related crimes have garnered significant attention as data indicated that the rise in youth involvement in such incidents did not align with an overall increase in youth offending, meaning that knife offending was disproportionately increasing in comparison to other youth violence (see HM government, 2018; McVie, 2010).

Over 15 years ago, the Met. police first declared a war on knife crime. Since then, goals to reduce knife crime have continued to be a focus for the police and the government. In 2021, the Home Office allocated over £130 million to address knife and violent crime. This funding supported various policing strategies including increased patrols, weapons sweeps, and stop and search as well as early intervention programs. These programs aimed to engage young people at critical moments, such as when they enter police custody or accident and emergency services, in order to steer them from future violence (HM Government, 2021). These projects aim to supplement existing police action as well as existing intervention programmes delivered by the Youth Justice Service following conviction (Phillips et al., 2022).

However, despite the significant time, manpower, and financial resources invested in combating knife-related offenses, the data does not indicate a consistent decrease in this type of crime (Gouga, 2021). Researchers have highlighted that there is a widespread lack of robust evaluations for knife crime interventions and programmes which makes it difficult to draw strong

conclusions about what works to reduce knife crime. It is possible that the slow progression on reducing knife crime may have been impacted by the limited use of evidence-based approaches in the assessments and interventions used with knife offenders.

A team of researchers from the University of Nottingham (Browne et al, 2022) conducted a comprehensive review of existing research on knife crime. Their aim was to gather and analyse studies on knife offender characteristics and interventions. They employed a systematic review methodology, using specific keywords to identify relevant studies, which were then assessed for their relevance to the topic. This approach allowed them to synthesise the available evidence and create a comprehensive overview of what is currently known about knife crime.

After screening 1352 titles and abstracts, only 21 papers were identified that met the inclusion criteria. These consisted of 15 on offender characteristic studies and six intervention studies

Findings suggested that knife crime may be associated with illicit drug use, exposure to any violence as a witness, victim or perpetrator and mental health problems.

Primary prevention strategies, such as stop and search, knife amnesties, media campaigns and curfews did not show a significant impact in reducing knife crime. By contrast, increasing offenders' access to tailored support regarding housing, education, and employment showed an impact in reducing weapon carrying. Further research is required in the area to support the reliability of outcomes.



The review found that knife offenders exhibit a considerable degree of diversity, indicating that there may be subtypes within this population. For instance, female perpetrators tended to commit offenses in domestic settings, whereas males were more likely to do so in community settings. Moreover, differences were observed between knife offenders who were affiliated with gangs and those who were not.

This review highlights the effectiveness of a customised, needs-based approach in reducing recidivism in knife-related offenses. However, due to the limited and diverse research on knife crime characteristics and interventions, making meaningful comparisons across studies is challenging. Despite these limitations, the research provides a much-needed insight into the existing evidence base and offers valuable guidance for future research and interventions.

As well as developing this review, the Centre for Forensic and Family Psychology at the University of Nottingham hosted an international Knife Crime Think tank. This Think tank brought together professionals from diverse backgrounds, such as UNICEF, who had experience in knife crime reduction. They summarised findings of their work so far and provided recommendations informed by their collective experience. These recommendations were later presented at a House of Commons briefing on Knife crime in November 2023.

The recommendations arising from this think tank comprised:

- Recognise the need for male role models where there is an absence of a positive father figure.

- Emphasise the value of good parenting (both mothers and fathers) and support the important role of raising children.
- Mentoring schemes and Youth Clubs need to be underpinned by long-term funding and jointly planned and overseen by local community groups.
- Increase involvement of individuals with 'lived experience' and relevant ethnic backgrounds in developing social policies and community strategies for prevention.
- Raise awareness and educate parents of the influence of internet and risks posed by violent media and violent social networks.
- Change the focus of interventions away from crime-related education and deterrence, to provide young people at risk with practical support related to housing, employment, education, mental health, conflict resolution and social skills with adults, peers, and their families.
- Local authorities need to take responsibility for every young person not in school, as they are at most risk. These include those with fixed term or permanent exclusions, those not excluded but asked not to attend and those home schooled.
- Increase the availability and funding of alternatives to custody and secure accommodation, such as specialist foster care families, Intensive Supervision and Support (ISS) orders and including Multi-systemic Therapy, so the whole family can be engaged and supported.

These recommendations were discussed at the Parliamentary briefing and were summarised into the following action points. These have been circulated to Police and Crime Commissioners. The intention is to incorporate these points into the manifestos for the upcoming elections.

- Provide access to tailored support regarding housing, education, training, and employment to young people in inner city deprived communities. (UK research has shown this results in a 50% reduction in young people carrying knives).
- Support young people's need for a sense of belonging with secure emotional attachments in a family environment
- Long term funding for Youth Clubs and Youth Interventions – including mentoring
- Identify and work with those missing and/or excluded from education
- Address the availability and impact of violent media entertainment and violent social media, and recognise their contribution to young people engaging in anti-social and violent behaviour.

Most importantly, findings from the systematic review and insights shared by professionals highlighted the absence of a clear evidence framework. Consequently, it was strongly advised that any initiatives aimed at addressing knife crime in our communities should prioritise dedicating sufficient time and resources to research and evaluation. This approach would enable the generation of findings that can inform 'what works' for tackling knife crime in our communities.

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# What if we have built the walls of our prisons too high?

By "Anon"- a former prison officer

**P**erhaps a slightly unusual dream for a teenaged girl, I had my sights set on becoming a prison officer since I was fifteen. Fresh out of university, I finally made it to a large London prison holding over a thousand men. Whilst the chaos and the action did not disappoint, the humour and the humanity were more than I ever could have imagined.

Beguiled by this side to prison life that the rest of the world doesn't see, I became determined to demystify the world of prisons and the people within them and generate a brave and informed conversation around a transformation of our justice system.

I always want to connect, so please contact [me through bruce.houlder@gmail.com](mailto:me through bruce.houlder@gmail.com)

It took me less than a week as a prison officer to witness first-hand the controversy which has prisoners and prison staff alike, stumped. The curious phenomenon that puzzles anyone who has ever spent any time in prison, which still, to this day, remains an unsolved mystery.

*Why do they only serve the left leg of the chicken in jail?*

Honestly. Almost every day the prisoners are served some form of chicken dish. The large metal vats are wheeled over to the wings packed

with chicken legs swimming in some nondescript red sauce. Every single one of them - the left leg of the chicken.

Now, I'm willing to hedge my bets that if you asked any crime enthusiast - journalist, voter or politician - this would be the first they have heard of this conundrum. I imagine, if you instead asked them to describe what a prison *looked like* they would have no issues conjuring up the stained, gloomy, foreboding facade with vicious razor wire for arms which stretch along high concrete walls. They might then venture to describe the scuffed landings lined with metal doors and adorned with the purposeful white nets they've seen in a documentary or a newspaper.

But I'm convinced that not a single one would have the faintest idea that week in, week out, prisoners and officers tower over lukewarm vats of slippery chicken perplexed: buzzing, speculating and dreaming about the whereabouts of that elusive right leg.

I'm not suggesting it's the sort of issue which should get to parliamentary debate, although I wouldn't be opposed to getting to the bottom of it once and for all, but to me it begs the question: do people really have any idea what prison is like?

Whilst the courts are open to the public and policing happens all around us, very few people actually see life in prison. It's as though prison happens *in private*, behind closed doors, like a dirty secret. *Out of sight, out of mind.*

But as crime rises ever higher in the list of manifesto priorities, I don't feel comfortable with this - for want of a better phrase - *blissful ignorance*. In fact, as the unregulated debate spills out over social media and I watch people all over the country wallow and writhe

in comforting, oversimplified slogans claiming to answer all their prayers, I can't help but feel like we've entirely lost sight of what our prisons are meant to be. And if we can't decide, I'm frightened that our prison system is destined to become a scorched battlefield, a no-man's land, its straight-line borders eternally squabbled over. The liberal against the conservative, the young against the old, the economist against the punitive populist...

For argument's sake though, let's take the politics out of it for a moment. Let's strip it back to basics, see if we can make any sense of it.

Something which we can generally all agree on is that prison has four overarching purposes: incapacitation, deterrence, rehabilitation, and retribution.

At a first glance, incapacitation is simple enough. It's essential too, in my experience. I have seen enough jagged wounds and been thrown to the ground in the disorder of a prison brawl enough times to know that. How it is decided, who, when and for how long a person should be incapacitated is a different conversation, but the need for the government to protect their society by removing certain people is somewhat indisputable.

It's when *punishment* is brought into the equation that this paradigm gets complex for me. The punishment for a crime has to be substantial enough that it deters a person from committing the crime in the first place. If that fails though, it then has to be substantial enough to deter them from committing the crime a second time. However, now it must simultaneously be *intrinsically remedial* as well as *substantially punitive* - that is to say that instead of purely



pushing a person further into the depths of criminality by burdening them with more deprivation, isolation or trauma - that punishment should be accompanied by a *rehabilitative force* which leaves them in a better condition than they were before they committed that crime originally. And of course, before they endured that punishment.

As if all that wasn't already enough to balance though, this punishment somehow also needs to be *grave* enough that we as a society, or as victims, consider *retribution* to have taken place.

*Retribution*, revenge, payback, justice, whatever you want to call it - that's the bit we don't talk about openly enough. It's been a key pillar of our criminal justice system for centuries, though. Right up until the seventeen and eighteen hundreds the public could see justice being done with their own eyes and take their revenge on those nasty, hungry thieves by throwing rotten fruit at them in the stocks or watching their corpses fall still in the gallows.

Those publicised practices were designed in such a way partly to serve as deterrents, but crucially, to satisfy the public's retributive thirst.

Today though, when punishment happens behind closed doors, where can people go to quench that thirst?

When we've built the prison walls so high that (almost) all that can escape are overcrowding statistics and the odd picture of a 6x8 foot cell with, God forbid, a telly in it.

When our only window through which to *witness* this punishment is TV dramas where two-dimensional villains thrive on prison wings or news articles where malicious black-eyed men

accused of heinous crimes glare back at us smugly from mug shots.

I find it pretty hard to believe that our appetite has just faded away. In fact, I think our search for that retributive feed is stronger than ever, we've just found new ways of indulging it.

Perhaps we've simply swapped the stocks for Twitter and the gallows for soundbite headlines, so we can sit comfortably in our armchairs and demand longer sentences and fewer chances for people *like them*. Not us, but them. Those beings who we have nothing in common with. Who really aren't our problem. Who certainly aren't our fault and frankly, who we're better off without.

We've created not just a physical barrier between us and them, but a moral distance. It's as though we've constructed these places, segregated them from our communities, obscured them from our line of sight and washed our hands of them. Like we've started to view prisons simply as a solution to our societal waste. And like the great Pacific Garbage Patch we will just continue to bag up our unwanted and ship them off to be dealt with elsewhere. *Out of sight, out of mind*.

But there's a price to pay for that. Time and time again, with every person who comes out of prison just as likely, or more likely, to commit a crime than they were when they went in, that price rears its ugly head.

It seems to me that as a nation we are conflating deterrence with retribution. Or in some cases, simply calling retribution deterrence. And for us to get a grip on our prison system which is swelling towards an unsustainable mass, we have got to re-find that balance. We have got to

understand deterrence and that means prioritising the *prevention of crime*, not the *reparations for crime*.

I don't know what the solution is, but I do know that it has to start with a curiosity, not with a contempt, for our justice system and the people within it.

If we can get curious as a nation, then I am convinced that we can unlock the potential we have for a justice system we are proud of. Because this country is bursting with the ingredients for a system which works. We have decades of ground-breaking research into human psychology which actually tells us how to influence a person's behaviour. We have hundreds of thousands of dedicated teachers, ready for the funding and the training they need to divert the children they spend their days with away from crime. We have thousands of professionals; police officers, prison officers, solicitors and judges, social workers, probation workers, politicians and civil servants with initiatives, entrepreneurs with resources, mental health specialists - and most importantly, we have some exceptional, motivated and dedicated people with lived experience of prison who can guide us at every step of the way.

Government policies have already taken huge steps towards innovative and effective prison reform, but whilst the public continue to demand policies that are tough on crime, all these minds and all these powers are constrained to drive change in silos, in their third sector organisations or on their personal plights. Their potential is hampered because we refuse to change the political narrative around crime and people who commit it, whatever is happening behind the scenes.



We as the public have the power to change the direction of our prison system by calling for our leaders to put research and expertise at the forefront of reform. We are never going to reach a total consensus on how the government tackles crime, but we can give the government the confidence to publicly and proudly commit to a considered and evidence-based transformation of the justice system.

We as the public need to call for leaders to get wise on crime.



## We Need to Elevate the Profession of Youth Work

By Sammy Odoi, Managing Director, Wipers Youth CIC

**G**rime kids is an enjoyable BBC Three drama written by Theresa Ikoko and inspired by DJ Targets non-fiction book by the same name. Set in the early 00s, it's a heart-warming tale of five teenagers exploring friendships, loss, illness, families, fathers and sons, heartaches and triumphs, all against a backdrop of a new energetic sound that would go on to have mainstream global appeal.

I watched it with a joyous sense of nostalgia, engulfed by a flood of memories inspired by the soundtrack, colours and fashion so accurately portrayed.

But it was the subplot of one of the lead characters, Bishop, and his youth worker Chris, that really resonated with me. Bishop, an aspiring young producer makes some poor decisions which gets him in a pickle with an unsavoury character. Chris, with the vision and

wisdom that lived experience brings, warns Bishop "choose your company wisely", but when that advice goes unheeded and the situation gets peak, Chris intervenes at great personal expense to help Bishop out.

Chris is symbolic of so many youth workers I knew when I started my career as a youth worker 22 years ago. Most of my colleagues had that same drive and commitment to do all within their power to help young people grow and develop, make the right choices and in some cases avoid making the same mistakes they made. I still recall with fondness the relationships and experiences I had running sessions in my voluntary church youth group, which led to me seeking work as a residential support worker, outreach and detached youth worker and set me on my way to pursuing a career in youth justice and social work. Seeing the impact that a trusted adult could have on a young person's development was one of my motivations for starting Wipers Youth CIC - a social enterprise which values the importance of frontline youth 'engagement' workers with lived experience, to help young people have a clearer vision for a safer journey through their adolescent years.

Sadly however, many of my colleagues from back then are no longer in the profession. Over the past twenty years, they have been the casualties of extended austerity, reduced funding and youth club closures, that has seen many qualified and capable individuals leave the profession for other more economically stable careers. The devastating impact of the pandemic soon justified their decision as the mass closure of youth facilities saw youth workers - a large segment of whom

had part-time short-term contracts - thrust into financial hardship and some have not returned to the sector at all.

The merit of youth work is well known but still undervalued. Youth work plays a crucial role in empowering young people. It supports young people's development, providing guidance, mentorship, and a safe space for growth and learning. Many youth workers have grown up in the same localities in which they work, and most will have faced the same challenges and obstacles as young people today albeit in different forms. This lived experience can make someone a better frontline youth worker because it fosters empathy, understanding, and relatability with the challenges young people face. It enables the youth worker to connect on a deeper level, offering more meaningful support and guidance based on personal understanding and shared experiences.

Research indicates that the informal support provided by trusted adults within the community are key to improving safety, and a vital protective factor in any public health strategy aimed at tackling knife crime and serious youth violence. Those trusted adults & VCSE youth work practitioners need to be well-supported and adequately trained to understand the impact of trauma on young people. In my experience, youth workers are best placed to spot the signs of pending violence and intervene at early stages through simple words of advice that can positively impact young people's consequential thinking process.

I remember an experience almost 20 years ago when a young man I was mentoring was seriously stabbed and lay in a life threatening condition in



hospital for many days. I remember the panic when I first got the call from his sister informing me what had happened. I recall the feelings of dread I had, fearing the worst and hoping for the best as he fought his life in the ICU. Thankfully, he pulled through and was released from the hospital some days later. When I drove him home from the hospital, it wasn't long before a large group of his friends showed up at his home to check on him. They sat on the stairwell in his block of flats, discussing what they were going to do about the fact that one of their own had been injured and almost killed. Some wanted to retaliate straight away, some wanted to wait, some wanted to let it go altogether. They discussed the pros and cons, saying how it could easily have been one of them, and how doing nothing could be as risky as taking action. Emotions were high and feelings tense. I said nothing for a long time. I just listened.

I knew some of the boys from the youth club and others I'd only seen a couple of times before. I saw the fear, pain and hurt in their faces and understood that feeling of powerlessness and a loss of control that they were all feeling, even though it was only one of them that had been stabbed. Towards the end of the conversation, myself and another youth worker that was present reiterated some of the potential negative consequences of retaliating that some of their peers had already mentioned, as well as adding in a few more they hadn't considered. We encouraged them to let it go. They all went their separate ways and thankfully there were no further incidents that followed that occasion.



Actor Benjamin Cawley plays Youth Worker - Chris - in the hit BBC drama Grime Kids

I look back now and often wonder what might have happened if myself and my colleague weren't there that day? How much impact did we actually have in reality?

Would there have been the same result regardless of our presence? Or did we help prevent another young person get hurt and potentially lose their life? Without a quantum-leap crystal ball to show every possible outcome across the multiverse, it's impossible to know. Therein lies the conundrum of youth work and how you quantify its effectiveness. Far from being mere babysitters that entertain

kids with table tennis and playing pool, there is myriad of invisible, soft skills and personal and social development that is virtually impossible to measure.

We need to elevate the profession of 'Youth Work' so that those with the passion and desire to create positive impacts within communities see it is a viable career option. Recognition of youth work as a respected profession contributes to its legitimacy and effectiveness. Long term investment is needed to offer pathways to accreditation and qualifications such as undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in youth work or youth and community studies, as well as apprenticeships and training programs that provide practical experience in youth work settings.

I've been pleased to see that the Mayor of London has invested millions of pounds over the last 18 months to provide funding and sustainability for organisations that provide mentoring for vulnerable young people, and train trusted adults that help those most at risk of exploitation or exposure to violence and crime. This is really positive to see, after such a long period of deprivation for the sector. Hopefully it will see more people returning to the sector with better offers of longer-term and permanent contracts with respectable salaries and career benefits.

However, it will take many years to rebuild the solid infrastructure of youth clubs and organisations that we once had in London. It will require unrelenting commitment amidst likely hurdles of changing governments and government policies, economic challenges and shifting societal

attitudes, all of which remains unclear at this time what the future will hold. One thing that is clear however, is that the trusted youth worker and local youth hubs need to be front and centre in any conversations around reducing violence and increasing youth safety.



*Sammy Odoi*  
Managing Director, Wipers Youth CIC



**Sammy Odoi**

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FIGHTING  
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## The Positive Approach of Hope

By Professor Niven Rennie, Chair, The Hope Collective

**W**hen I was Director of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit I was invited to speak across the world about the issue of violence in our communities. Many looked to Scotland for direction due to the reduction in violence that had occurred there since the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit was formed in 2005. That year Scotland had experienced 137 murders, about 50% of these were in Glasgow - the 'murder capital of Europe'. Last year 48 murders were recorded in Scotland - a significant reduction but still 48 too many.

Nonetheless, this reduction in homicide, with similar reductions also recorded in numerous other violence related statistics, was recognised as being significant. Many other areas of the UK and numerous jurisdictions across the world were keen to learn about Scotland's journey in the hope that the approach adopted there could be replicated and similar progress made.

I explained that Scotland's success lay in the adoption of a 'public health approach'. This is a preventative approach aimed at identifying the root causes of violence and thereafter ensuring that numerous organisations play their part in tackling these issues before they progress to the stage that the police and the justice system require to take punitive action. Thus the role of social services, health and education became paramount and it was recognised that the justice system did not 'own' the violence problem with which Scotland had wrestled for generations.

Numerous projects contributed to the success that was achieved. For example, our education authorities recognised that school exclusion was a self-defeating measure and sought to keep pupils in schools by recognising the factors that contributed to poor behaviour and the provision of adequate support to address these.



The contribution of mentors and skilled youth workers were identified as crucial in order to provide not only invaluable guidance but also the presence of a positive adult role model, so often missing from the lives of many of our young people. Employment provided young people with direction and a sense of purpose as we recognised that 'nothing stops a bullet like a job'.

Despite all the successes, however, Scotland's journey was not all good news. As our violence figures reduced, we started to record the worst drug death statistics in Europe. Our long-standing problems with alcohol abuse continued and our prison population reached record levels. Suicide, particularly amongst young men, became a significant issue – Scotland had numerous other issues to address.

The problem is that we tend to view these issues in isolation. In truth, they are related. Our violence related work identified that 1% of the Scottish population experienced 65% of violent crime. The same people that comprise that 1% tend also to be overly represented in all of these other measures of adverse outcomes, they were overly represented in our COVID statistics too, and they are to be found in our poorer communities.

In truth we know that already. For many years we have recognised that health outcomes and life expectancy vary significantly by post code. We know that our prisons are full of individuals who have come through the care system and that many that we incarcerate have problems with drugs, alcohol or mental health. Academic studies across the world underline the fact that poverty and inequality are the key drivers of violence, the greater the levels of poverty the higher the homicide rate.

Despite these levels of knowledge, we tend to focus on each issue in isolation and tackle it as it presents. The root causes and connections are ignored, perhaps because they appear too hard to address. We use punishment as our response and claim that our young people should know better! Terms such as 'knife crime' and 'youth violence' became industrialised, our young people written off. I would contend that we use the justice system to address our societal failings due to our inability to seek an alternative.

Indeed, if we agree that poverty and inequality are the drivers, and the evidence tends to support that contention, we must recognise that many of our policies and decision making have merely made matters worse. It can be argued that austerity and other political decisions have merely exacerbated the levels of poverty throughout the UK and thus increased criminality leading to a significant rise in violence and intolerable pressure across the justice and health systems which, in turn, has placed added pressure on a diminishing public purse.

In a time when statistical measurement is utilised to monitor progress, when KPI's and target measurement are the norm, I would suggest that the rise of foodbanks, baby banks and fuel banks across the UK should be our measure of political success. A relatively new phenomenon – they stand as testimony to the reduction in living standards that have occurred of late, as an indication of the lack of compassion in our wider society. If that is the true measurement of success we are failing significantly.

There is another way.....

On 27 November 2000 a 10 year old boy named Damilola Taylor senselessly died in London. He was a victim of

violence. His death resonated across the world and the 'Damilola Taylor Trust' was born. Damilola spoke of his 'hope' of becoming a doctor and changing the world. The Damilola Taylor Trust believed that his sense of 'hope' should be his legacy.

From their work a parliamentary commission was created to look at the issue of violence as it affects our young people. The commission led to the creation of violence reduction units across the UK with the aim of emulating Scotland's violence journey.

Key members of that commission believed that more was required, however. They wished to create the greatest public health movement seen in the UK. They formed the Hope Collective, an organisation aimed at giving our young people a better future. More than that, the Hope Collective aims to be merely a platform for these young people to set their own agenda, to speak positively about their hopes and aspirations, to show they are much more than the terms 'Youth Violence' and 'Knife Crime' tend to suggest.

In the past 2 years the Hope Collective has held 24 'Hope Hacks' across the UK. Events run by young people for young people. During these they discuss the issues of the day – education, housing, employment, mental health, racism and division and so many more. They identify solutions much more imaginative than those being progressed at present. They aim to identify a more progressive society in which they will dwell – a society with hope at its heart.

I spent 31 years as a police officer. At many times during my career I despaired at the repetitive nature of our response, the generations of families that knew

prison was their ultimate destination. I saw children born into homes where they had no hope, no aspiration and little opportunity. I saw society pour money into punishment and retribution, money that could well have been spent addressing the social problems that created the circumstances that led to the need to punish!

Our children need love, empathy, compassion and support. No child is born bad, it's the circumstances into which they are born that mould their future. We can make decisions that help them on that journey if we choose to do so...after all 'they are our children, not somebody else's problem'.

We can offer our children hope.....



*(Professor) Niven Rennie*  
Chair, The Hope Collective



**(Professor) Niven Rennie**

## Joint enterprise and gang membership: What do you need to know?

By Deanna Heer, King's Counsel, Senior Treasury Counsel at the Central Criminal Court

**1** What does joint enterprise mean to you? It depends where you stand. The convicted rail against the unfairness of being punished for a crime they 'did not commit'. The families of the dead want 'justice' for all those who added to the force of numbers against their loved one. More controversial is the use of evidence of gang membership and drill lyrics to prove participation in a joint enterprise. Despite the controversy, the Courts have consistently shown a willingness to allow this type of evidence to be used. So, at least until there is a change in the law, this is what young people need to know.

**2** The law of joint enterprise itself is not difficult to state: those who intentionally assist or encourage another person to commit a crime are just as guilty and liable to the same punishment provided they share the same intention as the person who commits the physical act. So, where someone is stabbed as a result of a group attack, those who help or

support the stabber may be held to be guilty of the same crime though they did not wield the knife. It all depends upon their intention at the time.

**3** How does the prosecution prove that a defendant present at the scene of an attack shared the same intent as the stabber? Whilst it is not necessary to prove that he knew the stabber had a knife, it's a good place to start. After all, if a man joins in a fight knowing his associates are armed, it's not difficult for a jury to conclude he intended that one of them would use a weapon should the need arise. And so the police will look for evidence which might demonstrate the defendant's attitude to knives and violence. The obvious place to start is his criminal record. If he has ever been convicted or cautioned for possession of a knife, regardless of whether it was used, the jury may hear about it. The prosecution may argue that this evidence makes it more likely that he knew that his friend had a knife. After all why would the stabber

conceal that fact from a friend who himself carries knives? If, in the past, the defendant has used a knife to threaten or injure someone, the prosecution may argue that he is someone willing to involve himself in a knife crime. A criminal record for knife possession is unlikely to remain in the past.

**4** The police will also look at the defendant's mobile phone, social media accounts and at platforms like YouTube and Tik Tok. What are they looking for? Evidence that he approves of the use of weapons or violence or is closely associated with the stabber. Evidence that they run with the same gang, sharing the same values, may prove that point notwithstanding that it is also likely to be prejudicial, painting the defendant in a generally bad light.

**5** Rarely is there direct evidence of gang membership. It goes without saying that gangs don't issue membership cards. The police will look for evidence that the defendant hangs out with known gang members in known gang territory and if they find rap or drill lyrics written by the defendant, or recordings of performances in which the defendant appears, this type of evidence may also prove the point.

**6** It should not be forgotten, however, that rap music is a form of, mainly black, expressive youth culture long accepted into the mainstream. Drill music, drawing on Gangsta rap traditions, whilst intending to shock and provoke, should no more be confused with reality than any other

genre of music. Does anyone seriously suggest that Johnny Cash really shot a man in Reno just to watch him die? The Courts are alive to this argument but incriminating evidence of drill lyrics or performances is not admitted in a vacuum. Looked at on its own it may be entirely innocuous. Put it together with other circumstantial evidence or direct evidence of involvement in a crime and it may add to the overall picture of guilt. Bob Marley only sang that he shot the sheriff. Life may have been more problematic for him, if the sheriff had actually been shot and Bob Marley was in the area at the time.

**7** Whether evidence of drill lyrics or performances will be admitted against the defendant will depend upon the nature of the evidence. Where a lyric can be attributed to the defendant, perhaps because it is found in his phone, where it refers to his involvement in an incident, or demonstrates knowledge about an offence from which his involvement can be inferred, it is likely to be admitted in the same way that any other confession will be admitted. Where, however, a defendant simply has possession of a rap lyric not written by him or which includes only generic references to violence or weapons, the opposite is likely to be true.

**8** Most cases lie somewhere between those two extremes but, more often than not, the Courts have shown a willingness to admit the evidence. In **Awoyemi**<sup>1</sup>, a shooting, the evidence included handwritten rap lyrics found in the defendant's possession which referred to guns and a gang and included threats of retribution for murdered members and threats



to shoot rivals. This evidence was admitted because it was said to show the extent to which he had signed up to gun and gang culture. It was evidence of motive, making it more likely that he was not innocently present at the scene.

**9** In **Dixon-Kenton<sup>2</sup>**, a stabbing, evidence of gang membership was admitted to disprove the defendant's claim of self-defence. The prosecution called evidence to show that he spent time with other gang members in gang territory. On its own, however, the Court said that this evidence would not be good enough. It was more convinced, however, by a video posted four months before the killing in which the defendant pointed to a street sign which bore the name of the gang and made a gang hand sign. He also then made a gun gesture and another hand sign said to represent the victim's gang. The Court took the view that the impression given by his participation in the video was that the defendant was part of the gang, allowing the prosecution to argue that the stabbing was gang related.

**10** In only one reported case, **Alimi<sup>3</sup>**, has the Court of Appeal overturned a conviction because rap evidence has been wrongly admitted. In that case, the defendant appeared in two videos posted online. In the first he was an extra who could be seen drinking and swaying to the music. In the second, he could be seen sitting in a motor vehicle whilst others dramatically counted out the alleged spoils of their drugs related business. The Court of Appeal held

it was an important distinction that Alimi's role was simply as an extra and he spoke no gang related lyrics whatsoever. Had he done so, the position might be different.

**11** Are there lessons here for young people? Running with a gang brings obvious risks and the Courts are alive to the type of evidence which can now be found online to prove it. Knife possession is being taken increasingly seriously. Sentences are getting tougher but that may not be the end of the matter. A history of knife possession only makes it more likely that a charge based on joint enterprise will stick. The past is not another country.

**5 | P | B**

5 PAPER BUILDINGS

*Deanna Heer, King's Counsel,*  
Senior Treasury Counsel at the Central  
Criminal Court



**Deanna Heer, King's Counsel**

### Further Reading

[1] [2016] EWCA Crim 668

[2] [2021] EWCA Crim 673

[3] [2014] EWCA Crim 2412



## United Against Violence: West Ham United Foundation's prevention, intervention and partnership approach

By Joseph Lyons, West Ham Foundation CEO

**W**ith knife crime on the rise in the capital, there is a need, now more than ever, for an effective approach to youth violence prevention. Youth violence continues to be a complex and prevalent issue facing our communities as well as the nation, therefore, an issue that no organisation or sector can tackle alone.

There is significant evidence that community coalitions which use local data to understand problems and inform preventative action are effective in addressing youth violence. Recognising this, the Foundation has spent years building partnerships across East London with councils, GP surgeries, as well as independent organisations dedicated to methods of

prevention and intervention in order to tackle youth violence.

For the past two years, we have been proud to partner with Her Honour Judge Sarah Munro KC, Senior Circuit Judge at The Central Criminal Court, and for the first time this year with Sheriff Bronek Masojada to host a roundtable discussion at the iconic Old Bailey. Focusing on tackling the growing rates of youth violence and anti-social behaviour, the event brought together a sector-diverse group of organisations and leaders, providing a platform to collaboratively explore solutions, share knowledge, identify root causes, and hopefully reduce the numbers of young people involved in gang crime.

In a broader sense, leveraging the influence of football and the iconic



West Ham United badge, along with its enduring presence as a cornerstone in the East London communities it serves. Over the past 10 years we have grown the Foundation's position in our community, and we now hold a comprehensive role which allows us to confidently deliver primary prevention programmes to young people at risk of engaging in criminal activity. In other words, preventing violence before it happens, through interventions that target key risk factors for violence perpetration and experiences.

Although delivery is wide ranging and spans over 35 initiatives, hosted in safe and accessible spaces across East London and Essex, there are a variety with a sharpened focus on combatting these serious issues. As part of this we have established comprehensive strategies which promote youth voice, social cohesion and emotional growth, skills development and empowerment: underpinned by our core aim of being a service which supports individuals, groups and communities to fulfil their potential.

Working with partners across the borough, the Foundation takes a multidimensional approach to provide hundreds of young people at risk of antisocial behaviour with the tools, networks and opportunities to improve their lives. Our diverse team of mentors, comprising of individuals hailing from the same areas as the participants, take a young person centred approach enabling

them to develop aspirations and build strong relationships.

I've captured our influence within some examples below.

### Advantage mentoring

Our workforce's commitment to a personalised approach is exemplified in the Advantage mentoring programme. As a nationwide initiative involving community organisations from various football club community organisations and their local NHS Trusts across the country, Advantage addresses and mitigates health inequalities through social prescribing. At the Foundation, mentors offer weekly support for mental health and emotional wellbeing of 14 to 21-year-olds. The programme plays a fundamental role in re-establishing aspirations and a sense of connection, overcoming barriers faced by individuals seeking traditional forms of mental health support, including challenges related to ethnicity, stigma, age, and gender.

### Jigsaw

Similarly, the WHU Foundation's Jigsaw programme targets young people between the ages of 10 to 18 who are at risk of involvement with gangs, as a result of being disengaged in school, or facing the risk of expulsion. Capitalising on the power of football and the West Ham identity, the Foundation delivers an outcome-focused programme that identifies participants' assets and positive attributes while



simultaneously mitigating their risk factors. Through dedicated mentoring sessions and consistent communication with social workers, the Foundation guides their individuals towards achieving their goals.

### Primary Care Network pilot

A groundbreaking project which concentrates on youth violence reduction is the Primary Care Network pilot, offering support for 11-18-year-olds at risk, by taking a public health approach in partnership with the NHS. Through the scheme, a WHU Foundation Youth Mentor supports a network of seven GP practices in Newham, working closely with health and social care professionals, to identify young people at risk of involvement in knife crime, implementing tailored preventative measures through dedicated mentoring support.

Dr Farzana Hussain, GP principal at The Project Surgery and Primary Care Network Clinical Director for Newham Central 1, has been invaluable in helping us to drive this initiative and her knowledge and experience is significant. As for the need, Dr Hussain has explained: "We know teenagers do not attend GP practices much, so it can be quite challenging to engage young people in Newham to come forward. Luckily through our partnership with the West Ham United Foundation, we work with their specialist young persons' link worker who has really connected with our young people and can direct them to various activities tailored to their needs, which include signposting them

to tennis lessons or football and basketball practice and giving them personal mentors."

During the 22/23 season, 38 people have been referred with 18 sustaining engagement and 75% reporting positive changes of behaviour.

Referral routes vary from high-risk areas to those personally affected by incidents involving family or friends, and individuals at risk due to social circumstances such as expulsion from school. We also get referrals from Newham Youth Justice and other entities and so we have to have an extremely diligent and robust set up which recognises that each situation and needs is different which helps us to adapt our response accordingly.

### Premier League Kicks

Funded by the Premier League's Charitable Fund, Premier League Kicks stands out as a project which exemplifies the comprehensive approach in the realm of youth violence prevention. Operating across seven locations, spanning Barking & Dagenham, Havering, Tower Hamlets, and Newham – including our main site in Beckton, PL Kicks offers eight to 18-year-olds free weekly football sessions. Essentially, it's a way of connecting with young people and give them a sense of community belonging by offering them a safe space to make social connections, stay physically active and therefore improve their mental health. However, Kicks does not limit itself to delivery on the pitch, it





also takes an education-based approach. Thanks to its network of partners, the Foundation's Kicks programme regularly delivers educational workshops focusing on employability, lifestyle, sustainability and security. Through its longstanding relationship with the police, the programme has also been able to deliver sessions every school term with the local authorities and young people alerting them of criminal trends in the area and ways to stay safe.

Whilst our efforts, networks and provision are constantly progressing, the challenges facing individuals, groups and communities continues to grow. Therefore, we must consider what we can do differently to have an even bigger impact than we are already having. This may require working in different ways and having uncomfortable conversations; however, we understand that it is critical if we want to instigate real change. As part of this process, I have been pleased to see that representatives we are working with across all sectors generally share this feeling and willingness to explore trends,

further collaborative working and help to tackle these issues with more scale.



FOUNDATION

*Joseph Lyons*

West Ham Foundation CEO



Joseph Lyons

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## Operation SCEPTRE

By Chief Inspector Rob Ranstead, Metropolitan Police,  
Violent Crime Taskforce

I have led Operation SCEPTRE for the Metropolitan Police Service for the last two years. This police operation is co-ordinated by the National Police Chiefs' Council across all 43 forces in England and Wales and the British Transport Police in a week of intensified action. Running twice annually the Met works closely with our partners to enhance enforcement, engagement, and education activity in relation to knife crime.

Being an operational police officer

for the last 20 years I have seen first-hand the consequences of knife crime on the streets of the capital, and the trauma this causes for individual's families and the wider community. I will always remember the first time I delivered a death message to the loved ones of someone that had died due to knife crime. I will also always remember the first time someone pulled a knife on me. These experiences have most certainly shaped me, they have influenced how – and most crucially,

why – I continue to police the capital.

Operation SCEPTRE weeks serve to intensify the focus on knife crime by doing more of what is business as usual for the Met. It is not lost on me that most people probably imagine that our activity is primarily focused on enforcement, and whilst these weeks do result in increased police patrols in hotspot areas and intelligence-led stop and searches, most importantly they provide an opportunity for us to engage with Londoners.

At times enforcement activity, and some of the tactics used, can be viewed as controversial. This can put us at odds with the communities that we seek to protect. However, with a more precise

approach to the use of stop and search, with regular reviews, we can assure that we use these tactics effectively. Working together with partners and our communities, we carry out joint weapon sweeps across the capital. This does not only serve to remove dangerous weapons from open spaces but offers a great opportunity for building relationships and enhancing trust with the public.

My personal view is that it is too late when the police are called to a stabbing, in the sense that the tragic event has already occurred, and the damage has already been inflicted. Of course, crime has to be investigated and justice has to take its course, but it would be better to focus on prevention and ensure such tragedies do not occur in the first place. The focus must be on education and engagement to prevent the harm in the first place.

Sadly, young people are particularly vulnerable to knife crime. Due to this, our partnership with education providers is more important than ever in ensuring that the message is spread about the harm you can do to others, yourself, and the community if you carry a knife. Much of the important work that goes on in this space is about understanding the reasons why young people feel they need to carry a knife. This may stem from a self-defence and protection perception, but can also be anything from carrying a knife to use to intimidate people, or to use as part of other crimes, such as robbery. Following this understanding, we can demonstrate the consequences of carrying a knife with a view to influencing and persuading better choices, especially amongst young people.



As a police service we need to evolve. For that reason, last month's Operation SCEPTRE saw a national focus on online knife retailers. This online space is challenging to police and provides access to a range of dangerous knives with such sellers offering, in some cases, limited or even non-existent age verification procedures. Current national trends show bulk online orders coming into online retailers with the weapons then being resold via other social media platforms. This is an area we are focusing on to deliver enforcement and engagement, to ensure that the same safeguards apply in the virtual space as they do in person.

Much of the work in this space goes unseen, and some of it will remain this way for obvious reasons, but part of Operation SCEPTRE involves working in partnership with two key agencies, the Border Force and the Prison Service.

The prison estate can at times be a dangerous environment for prisoners and staff alike. Following sentencing, habitual knife carriers do not stop carrying weapons inside prison. As a result, Operation WILSON takes place

in the prison estate aimed at reducing knife crime in prison by targeting those carrying weapons and disrupting the supply of knives/bladed articles available to use. The operation brings together police and prison resources in a coordinated effort to tackle a rise in serious violence at individual prisons as well as supporting existing activity that involves crucial engagement and prevention work. Using enhanced capabilities and intelligence, packages coming into the country containing knives and offensive weapons are intercepted. Working in partnership with other agencies, we can build up the intelligence picture, and take action ranging from simply knocking on a door and giving the intended recipient of the parcel advice, all the way through to more dynamic interventions such as obtaining a warrant.

The most recent Operation SCEPTRE took place between Monday 13 and Sunday 19 November 2023 and resulted in a range of synchronised activity across the Met, and the rest of the country. In London alone, this resulted in the following Enforcement, Education and Engagement activity.

Enforcement Activity	November 2023 total
Weapon sweeps conducted	956
Number of knives recovered from weapon sweeps	41
Stop and search conducted	1,298
Total number of knives recovered	190
Warrants executed	29
Number of arrests	397

Education and Engagement activity	November 2023 total
Community meeting/ education event	254
School engagements	165
Media events	19
Diversion visits	28
Leaflet drops	745
Retailer visits	42
Other	69
Test Purchase operations	19
Total number of engagements	1,341

Over the years Operation SCEPTRE has almost evolved into a brand of itself, and has become synonymous with knife crime. The activity the public sees during the operation is not confined to the week of coordinated action. Work to tackle knife crime remains ongoing. Every

single day serious violence remains one of the Met's priorities. Most importantly, we can't do it alone. We need to work in partnership with parents, teachers, charities, and communities in order to reduce and stop knife crime occurring in the first place.

*Chief Inspector Rob Ranstead*  
Metropolitan Police,  
Violent Crime Taskforce



Chief Inspector Rob Ranstead



# What we should have learnt and what we must now do to tackle knife crime

This is a shortened and updated version of a speech delivered at Lambeth Town Hall at the start of Operation Sceptre week - 14th November 2023

By ©Bruce Houlder CB KC - Founder of Fighting Knife Crime London

I am delighted, to be able to speak at one of these National Operation Sceptre events, and to see our organisation partnering with the Met, and being referenced on the 6000 leaflets they are distributing to schools and elsewhere over the course of the next week or so. The QR code there links directly to our now extensive public resources. These resources already tell you much about the social issues I want to speak about, how young people can be helped, and much too about the reforms that might be made.

I recognise that most of you will have gained a great deal of knowledge and experience about how best to engage with the communities you work with, whether as social workers, local authority professionals, professionals in particular field relating to young people or with experience just gained through your natural empathy and ability to work with young people. I want to say some things that draw these strands together and how we might all do a little better. Much will not be new to you, but some new thinking might also emerge from what I have to say.

The scale of the challenge is immense. Two days ago<sup>1</sup>, the Youth Endowment Fund published their second annual report into young people's experience of violence. It makes for pretty disturbing reading<sup>2</sup>. I will try not to send too many stats towards you, but a few are useful.

- 16% of teenage children had been a victim of violence in the last 12 months
- 47% of teens had been a victim or witness of violence in the last 12 months
- 68% of children that were victims said they'd experienced violence that led to physical injuries
- 60% of children saw real-world acts of violence on social media, increasing to over 85% of children most at risk of involvement with violence. 29% had seen content relating to weapons

And then we learnt of these statistics...

- 47% of children reported that violence and the fear of violence impacted their day-to-day lives
- 20% of children (1 in 5) said they'd skipped school due to feeling unsafe, and those were the omnes most likely to be exposed to greater dangers
- 62% of children thought that drugs were a major factor and half thought gangs were – the two highest drivers.

Good policing must be a mix of enforcement and the winning of community consent. This week will be the chance to reinforce that message, I hope.

Most of you have the advantage of me in that you know your communities

intimately on this side of London, the people within them that make change actually work, and will have learnt a great deal about how best to bridge the divide between some young people in the community who have for good reason or bad come to distrust the police.

What is it that we all are trying to build here, in this relationship between the police and community? Why do we need to do this? Well is to be assumed that we want to live in security and peace with our neighbour, create law-abiding communities, learn to understand and trust each other more, and help each other though that huge personal difficulties that more of us face than most of us perhaps realise.

Let's deal first with police and community. Two entities or one? Well to my mind we are one. As members of our discrete communities, with the police, we wish to protect our homes and our streets; and the police, overstretched as they are, stand alongside us in every community to serve and help us. The tension between that role and the front-line role of law enforcement will always cause issues, when there are minority sections of the community that do not want their lives and how they spend their time examined too closely. That's the job. It needs to be dealt with sensitively, and firmly at the same time. The skill involved in that equation cannot be underestimated, and we cannot relax in our joint determination to get this balance right. These are issues for a different discussion.

As the Commissioner has recognised, policing and the community cannot be separate interests. I know from some of the excellent community safety



officers I have met, that they, as most of the rest of us, are trying hard to help and understand the level of anxiety that afflicts too many people in terms of keeping their head above water emotionally, and in so many other ways. There has never been a greater need for powerful social care support – for the elderly, for the poor and for the socially and economically dispossessed. And there has never been a more important time to address the deficit in our attention towards young people.

The young people who carry knives or those who might be thinking about it are my main concern. There are some pretty general views about why these young people might think of such a thing. Leaving aside some pretty terrible personal stories and home lives, the reality are that young people are assailed in a way that my post-war generation never were, by competing and often negative value sets, being lectured to about their gender, racial identity, overwhelmed by the pressures imposed by social media, and the dilution of informed debate into what often seems to be a completely unaccommodating and intentionally hurtful online messages, about who is in and who is out and who to fear and who to trust.

Dangerous, and angry messages are promoted by social media. Hate is disseminated sometimes at the school gate or by simple Chinese whispers. It leaches into the lives of children through bullying and worse. Sometimes even by something that should be as life enhancing a music can become a messenger of death. For those unlucky enough never to have had the home life or any of the advantages which most of us have at least to some small extent,

the feeling must be that the good things of this life have let them behind and will never be achieved; that life offers little or nothing for them, and that life itself is cheap, and voices of authority are no longer on their side, nor do they understand them.

So, this is what faces someone with no usual support system, for someone who feels that his school, his home, present opportunities and his foreseeable future are things from which he had either been excluded, quite literally, or that they are places or prospects projecting deep unhappiness, and no lasting meaning. Not everyone of course that carries a knife is in a gang. But, is it really surprising, that some will join a gang, that they join with those they briefly see as friends, their peers if you like, that they believe the promise of money, of new things and status – something which no one and nowhere else has ever offered them to slightest chance of getting? To me it is natural that they should be so tempted, even if it's a fool's world they are entering where the promise of all those things is just a delusion.

How does the rudder finally fall off? It might the result of staying away or being excluded from school, and then a seductive encounter with a gang member in the street, and soon after sliding almost imperceptibly into what turns out to be a gang, and the cult of criminality that often attaches itself to such a grouping. In part, it's a failure of education, of family disintegration, domestic violence, lack of social support and most of all, poverty and opportunity. And also some of these kids can fairly say – it is our denial of respect for the importance of their young lives.

I came to the work I do now with FKCL in 2020. There had just been a report which showed that since 2010, 75% of the budgets for youth services had been cut since 2010, and over 8000 youth workers had lost their jobs<sup>3</sup>. Knowing that, it was easy to lay alongside those years, the sharp rise in the use of knives and deaths of young people in the UK to the point that more people died at the point of a knife in the year to March 2022 than ever since records began in 1946.

I heard it claimed too that that these hard facts have increased the skill sets of the surgeons working in our hospital trauma units at a speed commensurate with battlefield trauma centres, and without this the number of deaths would have been even higher than this. I can well believe it. As I write this, I hear that another young man has been killed, this time much closer to where I live in West London. Every day we can read of such things, and that many of those who are stabbed survive is often a matter of sheer luck.

But to mention these things is not enough to explain what is happening here. We still have to ask why it is that many of our young people end up carrying a knife or other weapon, or join a gang, and perhaps get involved in County Lines. Why it is that young people still carry knives, and not just for protection? That most do it for this last reason is mad enough. They know the risks, but do not seem to care. Some take a kind of perverted pride in the knife they carry, perhaps wishing to promote their own self-image through the designed-in fearsomeness of the weapon itself. And yet we still can see how easy it is to obtain such fearsome things online at staggering low prices.

And anyone selling these can no longer pretend that they are unaware of the use they might well be put, however much the purchasers might claim otherwise. These retailers are complicit in homicide. They have absolutely no excuse for the damage they are doing to the safety of our streets, and their responsibility for the death of our young people, and for the endless grief they cause for their families.

What kind of mind has been created that these young people, emerging from childhood to adulthood, with their brains exploding with all the sensations, powerful and conflicting emotions, and disruption that these years can bring?

What kind of mind has been created that young people with their lives ahead of them are ready to devalue their own lives, and those around them, by threatening, injuring and even another thoughtlessly killing another human being?

These killings are not so often on the spur of the moment, they are pre-meditated and vengeful, and often almost completely mindless. I have represented these young men in court, I have prosecuted them, and presided over trials where young men have thoughtlessly deployed knives against defenceless human beings. Even with plenty of time to think, they appear to possess no fear of consequences. No normally accepted appeal to reason or introspection seems capable of inhabiting the minds of those that do this. We have to address the reason not just the cause. The reason is perhaps to be found in our own shortcomings. Police officers, teachers, doctors, surgeons, social workers, youth workers, Courts and Coroners' Officers and even undertakers have something

to contribute here. All of them, even when working together, have tried, and to a great extent have failed. There have been successes, but no one pretends such temporal successes herald any lasting shift.

There is some excellent work being done by Professor James Densley at the moment in America which by engaging directly with young men who carry guns to kill who have opened up to him and explained why they do this, and how if things had been different, they might not have been so tempted. He has done similar work with County Lines<sup>4</sup>. Something similar needs to be done here, to get inside the young and damaged minds and lives and understand how things might change in a way that would make them change. They are many unsung heroes in our midst who do this work, directly with young people, working on the street, speaking to gang members who have succeeded. These are the people who have the stories to tell us, and who can inform those who work as mentors for young people, and who are their educators, and carers. We do need to listen, to show respect for those who are amidst or on the edge of this kind of disastrous journey in their lives, learn from them what it is they say, what they need and by this means learn how we can help them find a better way.

Of all the things that might work once education has failed, is one-to-one mentoring. This is often the most successful method, but how many of us in this work are really equipped to mentor every child amid this vortex of emotive disintegration? Every child is different, and every life experience is different too. It's a highly skilled job requiring more than just cursory

training, and requires tremendous intra-personal skills as well, to reach into a world that remains beyond the reach of most of our imaginings. But a good mentor can change a life, can save a life and is worth its weight in gold. Our website lists many such organisation across London who do this kind of work.

I have had a lot to say in recent years about how our legal system could approach the task of dealing with young people rather better than it does. My baseline is my own training as a judge. I had to undertake a refresher course in every year of the 34 years that I did that kind of work alongside all the prosecuting and defending I did as part of my regular practice. In my career I have seen too many evil things and met too many evil people to think that sometimes heavy sentences are other than necessary. Some people must be removed from our streets to offer a measure of safety for the rest of us. That, for the most part, is the only sense that 'prison works'.

My concern is that the level of debate about law and order, and the safety of our streets, continues to be one-dimensional. That is why I am so pleased to be amongst you today and to listen to you – people who work in their communities and understand these things and are trying to do something to change the way things are, and the way each and every one of us think about how we can make lives better, rather than just part of the journey on the way to the human rubbish dumps that some of our prisons have been allowed to become.

I remember when I was young lawyer, we were always taught to dig deep to understand if we could what

the personal difficulties were that young people had that might have led to them to offend. We were then helped by probation reports. Trained officers used to have a series of interviews with the accused, with family members and others to help the sentencing court with as much information as possible. Now a pre-sentence report is based more often on a single short interview with the accused which is dependent wholly on the information that he or she wishes to pass on in that brief hour when he or she might not be inclined to open up. Such reports make some references to the sentencing codes, which is the job of the judge to interpret, and produce a form of risk matrix designed to help the judge assess the risk that that person presents to the public at large and to some groups in particular, and whether the individual is rightly described as dangerous, thus requiring an enhanced prison sentence for public protection. These reports then end with a recommendation on sentence which may or may not be actually the right one. Formulas cannot deal with the personal, they can only guide. Mandated sentencing solutions can in practice prove unjust.

One result is that we now have more people in prison than ever before and as you now as you will know, the government are trying to deal with this by decreeing that sentences under 12 months should wherever possible be suspended.

As a country we are more inclined to consider poor prisons as a means of punishment than many other of the more enlightened countries in Europe that we might consider good comparators. Our magazine contains some informed articles on this, looking



not just at our own prisons but also for example the Norwegian custody model. I do think our penal policy has gone somewhat astray, and the ease with which we seem to be abandoning sentences of less than 12 months is an indication that it might not even be necessary to use imprisonment as tool of punishment for many offences, if it is better to rehabilitate someone and make sure they don't offend again. Prison does not achieve that last bit, and the resources applied to diversion and rehabilitation remain underfunded.

Quite simply, the cost benefit of changing lives far outweighs the benefit of jail time in so many cases.

What has happened with penal policy is another example where under-resourcing of public services have led to a threadbare support system held up largely by voluntary effort within communities, a shortage of police officers, a dearth of places for people to go for healthy recreation and to meet friends, and a slow disintegration of practically all the public services we have become used to accessing – from the NHS, to transport, to safe and maintained public spaces and to things like mental health support, and financial advice and support for the most needy.



There are many of you listening here who, and you are the real heroes, and have been working directly in this field for many years, and trying to make your own particular set of solutions work in some small way in your own locality. The London VRU has been able to support some of these efforts with tax-payers money, and it is thanks to these sometimes long-standing community projects, that there have been real successes. But we should be careful not to exaggerate this. The solution still largely eludes us.

Despite the power of Advanced Analytics and the opportunities that offers for more focussed policing, what should concern us most, is the apparent lack of coordination and will, that is put behind the recommendations that emerge from a whole raft of studies. I know quite about this as my greatest concentration has been on what I see happening by scanning the thousands of websites, government, charity and third sector reports, and social media outlets that are concerned with young people in one way or another. This is necessary both to build and improve the information resources that we provide, and to increase my own understanding.

But what else might we do to make us better at solving these problems? Action to effect real change in the life chances of our most disadvantaged must be one of them. Here a just a few ideas. They may need some work I acknowledge, but my purpose is to start debate.

- The manifesto of any government intent on reducing knife crime should tell us how they will actually go about this and how central to their programme it will be, and that

manifesto should not be vague in way that a glib tongue might render meaningless.

- I was pleased to read in the newspaper a few weeks ago that Labour is considering creating independent watchdogs to “mark its homework” in government and ensure it fulfils pledges to improve Britain’s health and reduce educational inequality. Bodies modelled on the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) would publicly hold ministers to account for progress against key Labour goals under plans being looked at by some close to Sir Keir Starmer. This kind of things is something I have been advocating for some time. Now we don’t know how far this might go yet, but it seems to me that this kind of thinking is key to reducing the issues around youth disengagement and youth criminality and violence.
- There must be a better way of making cross-departmental responsibility for these kinds of complex questions actually work. Whether that if brought about by greater power being placed into the hands of a single Cabinet Minister to direct other departments to act, or whether through a redesign of the civil service is not for me to say. But there needs to be a way. To be fair both parties are said to be looking at the mechanism of government to see how it can work more effectively. I have also in my time been a senior civil servant, so I know that things don’t work as well as we deserve.



- This lack of effectiveness has real consequences for charities. The National Council for Voluntary services said recently that too many charities are at risk of closure. They don’t think planned increases in departmental budgets offered by the last budget will be enough to keep pace with inflation. Worryingly, two thirds of charities reported they were already subsidising underfunded contracts long before inflation hit double digits.
- There is no publicly visible responsibility that passes from one Minister to another, if any of us can be quick enough even to keep up with these changes; nor that passes from one party to the same party under different leadership, nor from one government to another. We have seen Ministers come in and scrap proposals being worked on by their predecessors frequently. The result will always appear (at least) to be that we have just dysfunctional and ultimately disingenuous government. No wonder people

get angry about the slow pace of real change to problems such as violence on the streets.

- If only what these Ministers say in Parliament could be strengthened by the force of law, then things might change. On certain social issues there could even perhaps be cross-party agreement to ensure powerful solutions were carried more effectively from one government to the next. This could be done by legislation, so any government wanting to renege on the agreement would have to seek parliament’s approval to do so. If a Minister promises through parliament to act in particular way, there needs to be way to see that he is held to account for failure. The prize might be that we get more honesty in politics, and less disingenuous soundbites and promises of action. Are we not all fed up with hearing that ministers say that we ‘proceed at pace’, or ‘just to be clear’ something is an ‘absolute government priority’? If only this were the truth.

What happens if governments don't live up to their promises? Well here are some simple figures that might provide an answer. 15% of the population have no qualifications and 47% of prisoners are in the same category. Of the 1% of kids excluded from school, 42% of them end up in prison at a cost of goodness knows what a year. Yet we still see exclusion as a 'way to go'.

There are good people who say it will be time to give into the demand by the public for more stringent laws regarding knife possession (remembering that knives are carried for a broad range of reasons) coupled with longer penalties to send a powerful message against knife crime. Personally, I don't think that is the way to go, as there is too little evidence that so-called deterrent gets through to those who the message is intended to affect. Indeed, this kind of political grandstanding can just be a distraction from the real work that has to be done at community level to change the way young people think about carrying a knife. We know now where these things are happening most, and this is where the support if needed.

Until far more work is done to address early-education and intervention, and the social causes and public health issues that underlie these crimes, to understand the minds of the carriers, and work with the grain of their needs, then I don't think we have yet reached the point when the crude solution of ever-increasing punishment is the answer. The communities that produce these crimes are the same communities that (overall) were socially deprived 50 or 60 years ago. I cannot see that changing in the foreseeable future given the current

strain on public finances – at least until priorities change. Governments know well enough where the work must be done. It's not just a North-South argument. The money needs to go where the statistics tell us it is most needed, and that it is as much in London as in Sheffield, Leeds, Manchester, or Liverpool. After all, the West Midlands and Cleveland have a higher per capita incidence of knife crime than London at the moment.

Sad to say I really don't think governments or other parties have come up with the right balance yet to stop this problem of youth violence. I touched on this. Professor Peter Squires who is somewhat of an expert in these matters, wrote an article last year for us which said this *"...research by the YMCA and Action for children showed that some £260 million had been withdrawn from local authority children's services budgets between 2011 and 2017, with the loss of over a thousand children's centres and 760 youth centres, some major cities losing close to 90% of their youth services budgets. Although the Serious Youth Violence Reduction Strategy is meant to be informed by the Home Office compilation of research on the 'drivers' of serious violence (HM Government, 2018) a degree of scepticism has accompanied the suggestion that such under-resourced services can deliver the VRU targets sought."*

Political strategies so far have failed to address the root causes of knife crime and develop a practical understanding of what an optimal long-term strategy might look like. This is complicated by the fact that they are so overwhelmed with other priorities. There is a worrying danger too that the demands of law enforcement will

reduce the ability for police forces to involve themselves more in their communities. So - more power then to our community safety officers! We need them more than ever to work alongside community activists and youth leaders in our communities. We should be as one on this.

In London, central government has seemed to me too content to see the London VRU take responsibility when in fact we are all in it together. There was nothing substantial either in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement on November 22<sup>nd</sup> to give us cause to believe in a changed approach to community investment to help young people and communities.

Perhaps the best evidence of this failure to address the problem is to be found in the careful analysis in the report by Charity Excellence<sup>5</sup>. In its 2023 budget, they found that Government increased departmental spending by 4% (RPI inflation was running at 11.4% in April 2023) and included additional funding in areas such as health & social care. This report indicated that this has not flowed down to charity front line services, effectively creating a £1 billion funding cut in real terms. They warn that the risk of widespread charity closures is high and that we will now not see full sector recovery until 2025, and even that is more than optimistic. They find that the charity sector's resilience has been falling since late 2021, and say that their predictive model, has forecast the path of the crisis very accurately so far.

Nearly every organisation uses very similar language in describing what they do in their particular community. It might be the word 'empowering', or just that overused word 'collaboration'.

The solutions we need to find, as this article suggests, need to be like the problem itself, multi-faceted, complex, and sometimes interlocking.

So, I want to talk a bit about 'collaboration' today, because I really think we could do better here. I want to stop the word itself becoming a cliché. More people are now talking about this.

Proper collaboration, between individuals such as those attending this webinar, between police, government and community funded projects, could be much more empowering than it presently is for those that need it most. There are not just some silos that have to be reformed, but a bit of pride and entitlement from our political masters sometimes.

### What about public bodies?

The London VRU, at the request of the Mayor took on the task, funded by the tax-payer of leading a partnership approach to tackling violence that is rooted in prevention and early intervention. But this can only be effective with taxpayer's intervention and central government or Treasury intent behind it.

### Let look at some of the tensions here.

I have already argued that crude deployment of criminal justice solutions is not the answer to all these problems. What else might there be making this more difficult than it need be.

- What about the local struggles. In London these exist between the Mayor and the Met and the Home Office, and sometimes No 10. They each have their own constituencies to please.
- The Met of course is servant of three masters - the public



who cannot be expected to speak with a single voice, and the Mayor for London, and the Home Secretary who could, but do not always do so.

- When mature discussion fails, everyone will blame lack of resources, and a lack of investment to provide the tools needed to finish the job. At the end they get to the right answer, and it's not a good one. It's a failure of cooperation, a failure of imagination, sometimes (but not always) an inability to look at new solutions, and adjust our priorities.
- Perhaps too, and this is something for planners which might be worth thinking about, a tension exists between the community where the poorest live, and the resentment they feel that gentrification (as it was once called) can bring. This can cause rising costs all round, which these communities simply cannot sustain. Investing in communities can also leave the poorest with no place anymore that they can feel is the home they knew.
- Gentrification affects a community's history and culture and reduces social capital<sup>6</sup>. It often shifts a neighbourhood's characteristics, e.g., racial-ethnic composition and household income, by adding new stores and resources in previously run-down neighbourhoods.<sup>7</sup>
- Gentrification itself causes economic displacement: whole communities can be uprooted when rents rise. Some have

nowhere else to go, even if they wanted to. Once again, there is danger that we turn our backs and concentrate on the good and ignore the bad effects of social reform. We can only square this circle by coming together to find solutions to see that those who need it most are not left behind in all of this, and our young do not suffer at a critical time of their lives. It is in this space between that we need to collaborate most.

Sometimes there is a risk in this field for the familiar to become a cliché and words to become substitutes for action. Virtue signalling if you like. An ex-Tory minister, Rory Stewart, recently said in broadcast recently on the real meaning of privilege that it dates back to the Romans and the early Middle Ages. This class he was describing "generally does not deliver on what it promises, it is generally hypocritical, greedy and self serving" he said. Is it a coincidence that when we see an unarguable and visible erosion of the standards of public life at the top, then the standards of living of those at the bottom become most affected? Students of the Fall of the Roman Empire might see some parallels with what is happening in this first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One of the many reasons for this was given that "Rome's sheer size made it difficult to govern, (and) ineffective and inconsistent leadership only served to magnify the problem."<sup>8</sup>

But aren't we all to blame a bit? Nearly everyone speaks about collaboration. If we are going to use that term, we need to do an audit of what we are actually doing, and what we might be resisting doing, making usually some

convenient excuse for that inaction. Certainly, we must celebrate and boast about our own achievements on social media, which I see a lot of, but let's talk more about what we are doing to find better ways to work together. First, we need to understand better what collaboration could mean.

Collaboration is not quite the same as partnership. It is a more informal process of working together to achieve a common goal. In our field what we want from our partners is usually better described as collaboration. This in many ways is the more difficult thing. It involves a great deal of humility in accepting that you don't have the answers, but you might have something that could be better done under some other umbrella which has the back up and perhaps a wider expertise in helping a young person with whatever problem it is that they need help with.

- We can't all for example be expert mentors in every situation.
- We can't all help with social mobility or finding employment which maybe is what some of the young people we come across need most of all.
- A child with a particular mental health issue requires particular expertise, which one group will often not possess.
- Does your group have protocols or agreements with other organisations which might allow you to refer such a young person onwards, so long as that young person is happy to receive that help?
- Often a solution cannot be half baked, it needs to full range of options to succeed.

- We all have our different skill sets and can empathise better than others in a given situation.

So, let's share our skills and help those who need us better. Sometimes trust groups can be shared. Some of you may be doing this very well for all I know, but many of us could do better I am equally sure.

There have been many strategies produced by both charities as well as governments which present and action plan for change, which always come with recommendations. They are often of course the same ones we have seen in many guises, and end in too little being done. Events always conspire don't they to help them avoid responsibility for inaction.

A good example of collaboration comes from the brochure produced recently the VRUs Young 'Peoples Action Group (YPAG)<sup>9</sup>. We should listen more to our young people shouldn't we?

This guide has been created to support organisations of any shape and size to meaningfully work alongside young Londoners.

The views of these young people are front and centre of the VRU approach.<sup>10</sup> This means young people are given an opportunity to lead change in areas of society they are most passionate about, and do so through their own social action work.

Another good example I think is a June 2023 report which is a nice piece of cross-party working. It is an independent review co-chaired by former Children's Minister Tim Loughton MP and former Shadow Education Secretary Kate Green, and commissioned and facilitated by the National Youth Agency (NYA). This is the same excellent body that produced



the report “Hidden in Plain Sight” in May 2020 that took a deeper look at the scale of and response to gang-associated activity, the exploitation of young people through lockdown and the impact of COVID-19. There is more I might say about that report and the practicality of some of their recommendations, but there isn’t the time to do it now.

I want to pick out just 3 or 4 of their recommendations from their report last June. There are many more.

### 1. Clear leadership: Youth Minister

An over-arching cross-department youth policy with oversight by a dedicated Youth Minister at the Department for Education, but this time with a remit and authority across departments. There is currently a

Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing (DfE) and a Minister for Civil Society and Youth at the Dept of Culture, Media and Sport), each with a much broader range of responsibilities which they argue removes the focus a bit from the problems that need addressing to help young people. A Youth Minister within education, or a dual role held at DfE and DCMS to chair a cross-departmental committee, will support education and wellbeing objectives. Unless there is going to be cross-departmental support, these things will not work, and I suspect have little chance of gaining the required funding from the Treasury.

Next, they make proposals for stable and joined-up funding and strengthened guidance so that proposals can be acted upon with **statutory** guidance at both

national and local level to put youth work on a surer footing with schools and facilitate more cross-sector working. It seems to me that it needs to be a bit better than ‘guidance’ as that leaves discretion. It needs to be binding and enforceable. As it is, Statutory Guidance remains still guidance because, exceptionally and with good reason, local government might deviate slightly from it; but almost all the time, they must follow it. That’s all statutory guidance seems to be. Sometimes it can be challenged in court, and other times you may be wasting your time. Well at least, it’s a stick to beat someone with if needed.

Another recommendation is “integrating youth work values and approaches into initial teacher training and CPD training to support the cross-collaboration and understanding between school staff and youth workers.”

Finally they explain how this needs to feed into youth work careers. “There needs to be a transition route from teaching to youth work through a youth work qualification to reduce wasted talent”. This as most of us know is something that through the period certainly from 2010 onwards has been very seriously eroded.

Their work is complemented by a further report from the charity sector which has looked at “**The Economic Value of Youth Work**”<sup>11</sup>. Here UK Youth has partnered with Frontier Economics to estimate the economic value of youth work in England. In fact, Somia Nasim, Head of Research and Knowledge, UK Youth was one of the panel which produced the NYA report I have just referred to. This is part of a growing body of tech-led evidence

that can demonstrate the benefit of implanting measures to secure social change by showing how much money can be saved in other areas. As this evidence becomes more granular and detailed, and the science becomes stronger, I just hope it will become more difficult for governments to ignore the possibility of sound value for money for the UK taxpayer, through the positive effects that targeted investment has on young people in terms of mental health, wellbeing, education, employment and in other areas.

This is the kind of work I have long been arguing for. When governments speak about long term planning, why do they not pick this up more effectively. It could offer our young people, and wider society, so much that they have not been offered for many years. That is not to decry the work already being done by volunteers and others. But it makes me weep to find that almost that the recommendations made in these reports are never backed with the legislative power. Where is the budgetary responsibility in that, after all we pay for some of these reports to be produced? Again, I am referencing the lost opportunity in the 2023 budget. We seem to be going in the opposite direction, and soon it may be too late to stop this decline.

In November 2022 there was another excellent and well researched report (there of course dozens of reports emerging every year). It was the “Final report by the Commission on Young Lives”<sup>12</sup>. It is not as if we are short of road maps to bring about change. We just need to take more notice of what these reports say and try to come together to see they are acted upon.

I could mention many other less ambitious but practical messaging such as BKT's "A guide to knife harm for parents and carers"<sup>13</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

This article covers much ground, and I hope it will provoke further discussion on the topics it raises. We are having a general election sometime in 2024. If we don't hear about the issue this article raises, then we will have failed our young people, through neglect, we will have done much to harm the chances of the next generation as well. Some immediate priorities then are:

- Developing and implementing comprehensive youth violence prevention strategies. This must involve working together to identify the root causes of youth violence in their particular area, and develop new evidence-based programs and interventions, and coordinate service delivery through the existing local mechanisms.
- Sharing data and resources. This can help to identify and track youth at risk of violence, and ensure that they are connected to the services they need.
- Ensuring governments keep their word when Ministers make give parliamentary undertaking, sign off recommendations presented to parliament, or give statutory guidance.
- Ensuring closer work with policymakers to develop and implement programs, or to change laws and regulations that contribute to youth violence.
- Local governments and police could partner in a much more

organised way with non-profit organisations in their districts to develop and implement a cooperative youth violence prevention programs in their high-risk neighbourhoods, using any available funding to support this action. Some of this is happening with the VRU already in London through their My Ends<sup>14</sup> projects.

- Local schools might work more closely with a community mental health-centres to provide mental health services to young people who are at risk of violence, or who without help might face the risk of exclusion. Exclusion is a sure-fire way to secure the future seed-corn of gang membership. A health first approach to fighting knife crime might be more effective.
- Police forces should partner (as many do) with a faith-based organisations to provide mentoring and support services to young people who have been involved in violence.
- And most of all I believe there is room for a stronger coalition of organisations from different sectors that decide to work together to advocate for policies that support youth violence prevention, such as increased funding for after-school programs and job training programs. An organisation like the Hope Collective is a good example of that. You will find some others on our website.
- Finally on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> May at the Congress Centre in London there is a chance for us all to get

together and address the theme of this article, and discover the wonderful value in "Being Greater than Ourselves". You can find more detail [here](#). Put it in your diary and get a ticket now please. If you got this far you must be interested in the topic!

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