

FIGHTING KNIFE CRIME



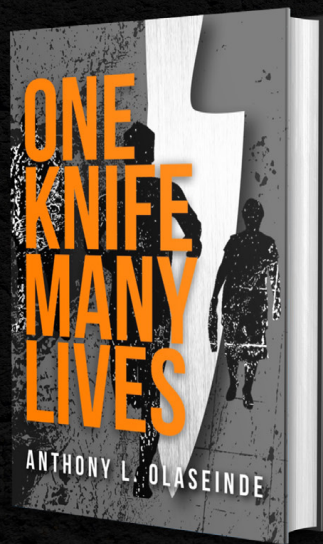
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Issue 8 - July 2023



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"I DIDN'T THINK IT COULD HAPPEN TO ME"



ONE KNIFE MANY LIVES

CAPTURES THE HARD-HITTING STORY OF THOSE WHO FEEL THE DEVASTATING IMPACT OF KNIFE CRIME. THROUGH PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND ENGAGEMENT WITH VICTIMS, THE AUTHOR GIVES YOU AN INSIGHT INTO THE CHALLENGES THAT MANY YOUNG PEOPLE FACE DEPICTING THE BRUTAL REALITIES OF KNIFE CRIME. WHILE HIGHLIGHTING DEPRESSION, DOMESTIC ABUSE, AND SUICIDE. ALTHOUGH THIS BOOK IS FICTIONAL, THE DANGERS OF KNIFE CRIME ARE VERY REAL.

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FIGHTING
KNIFE CRIME



Issue 8

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Foreword

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

This 8th Edition of FKCL's magazine engages a broad range of perspectives. We have a government minister, and 6 other experts whose understanding of the issues should really start to engage the minds of those who hold the power to support real societal change.

We start with a piece from **Allen Davis, A trustee of Growing against Violence** whose brilliant work with multi-disciplinary, cross profession partnership seeks to prevent violence and exploitation by working in schools across years 6-10. We commend this work. This chimes in well with our next piece from **Rt Hon Chris Philp MP, Home Office Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire** who whilst repeating a familiar

criminal justice approach, recognises that it is local partners in the community, in healthcare, policing and education, that guide at-risk children away from crime with workshops, therapy and sports. He says that these partnerships have prevented an estimated 136,000 violent offences in England and Wales.

Our next piece stays at the sharp end of reality. **Johnny Bolderson, senior manager at Catch22 for County Lines** support and Rescue service who analyses some issues surrounding County Lines and the issue of abandonment that makes too many young people a target for exploitation.

Next, we have **Anthony Olaseinde, aka 'Big Ant', the CEO of Always and Alternative**, a well-known and highly

respected figure in Sheffield whose crusade there is making a huge mark. As he says, education is his way of trying to get thorough to young people, but he likes to find alternative ways to engage them. This could be with arts, exhibitions, performing arts, media and indeed anything to try and get through to that one young person that needs support. I recommend a read. We all have much to learn from him.

Next **Adam Ballard, youth intervention specialist with 'Gloves not Gunz'** inspires us with the work he does with young people on the edge. He tells us how he uses sport to divert young people away from carrying and using weapons, and he brings considerable and empathetic understanding to why a lack of purpose drives young people towards dangerous lifestyles.

Our penultimate article is from **Adam Hawksbee and Shivani Menon from UK Onward Trust** who look at some of the evidence and solutions to violent crime, and how crime is symptomatic of wider socio-economic challenges, all of which are important to any politician who is serious about 'levelling up'. High poverty rates, health, and education deprivation, crumbling public services, and fragmented families are mutually reinforcing challenges which produce a complex web of issues that collectively and independently contributed to rising crime.

Finally, we have a detailed a thoughtful and nuanced explanation from **Michael Railton, an ex-police officer, now a director of ContexKey**, and an expert witness in the field of Urban Gangs. This piece covers gangs, drill music, social media, and youth violence. At FKCL, we hope this sparks some healthy controversy. As someone who has spent a life working closely in

criminal courts at every level, I know only too well how carefully one must examine assumptions about influences that are said to lead to criminal actions. This article recognises that. Michael also appears in an interesting examination of this subject on BBC3 called 'Drill on Trial' which you can find [here](#).

FKCL is now over 2 years old. We hope you find we have tried to live up to our original ambitions. Our active partnerships continue to grow and flourish. We are grateful to all have supported us and have helped us to learn and grow. Our only desire is to provide the best resource of informed information, opinion, and assistance to help all young people, whilst working in fullest collaboration for the benefit and welfare of all Londoners.

Bruce Houlder

Founder of Fighting Knife Crime London (FKCL)

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Bruce Houlder



Growing Against Violence: Protecting young people against peer-to-peer violence and exploitation.

A schools based approach.

Allen Davis, Chair of the Board of Trustees and Co-Founder, Growing Against Violence

Growing Against Violence (GAV) is a charity that helps prevent and protect against violence and exploitation by children, on children. We deliver a developmentally

appropriate curriculum at the reachable moments in a child's life to raise awareness of risk and give children the skills they need to make positive choices. Since 2008 our

sessions have been delivered to over 275,000 students in more than 1400 Schools and Colleges across England.

GAV sessions are delivered by specially trained facilitators, to class size groups. The universal delivery model is integral to what we do, as we aim to reach and influence all young people in order to raise awareness of risk and give all children the skills they need to make positive choices.

Our 10-session curriculum has been developed in conjunction with leading criminologists and is regularly updated to incorporate the latest themes and trends young people are highlighting to us.

In these workshops, we address the root causes of violence, and work on keeping young people out of gangs, exploitative peer-on-peer relationships and away from antisocial behaviour.

Why GAV is needed

Before I address, what we do, it is important to highlight why GAV is needed. Sadly, we see that children and schools are confronted by the following issues:

- Vulnerable children can be targeted by organised gangs and find themselves being coerced, groomed and exploited
- There is an endemic problem with the sexualisation of children which is leading to an increasing trend of peer-on-peer abuse, sexual abuse and harassment
- Some abusive behaviours between children have become increasingly normalised
- Children are spending more time online, and this can increase the risk of being exposed to



- inappropriate content, abuse, harassment and exploitation
- Many abusive behaviours by children are normalised and go unrecognised by children, adults and professionals. This means abuse and victims of abuse go unnoticed.

The reality is that children face multi-faceted risks that are present both on-line and on-road. County lines, gang recruitment, sexual harassment and violence, social media, knife crime, sharing nude imagery and cyber bullying do not happen in isolation, and there are complex relationships between all these risks.

Young people need to be supported

at a very early age, as the decisions they make will directly impact on what risk and harm they may be subject to. Young people receive an evidence-based curriculum to raise awareness of the risks associated with child-on-child abuse and exploitation. We insist on the children's schoolteachers being present in the classroom so can support them identify risks that they otherwise may not be aware of, as it is often the children who know more about the issues we discuss.

It is imperative that we enable children to raise concerns and seek help and support. Disclosures to our facilitators are incredibly common. We work in partnership with schools to address these complex safeguarding risks. By collating the themes and trends from the disclosures received, it gives us the opportunity to be an authoritative voice on emerging safeguarding issues relating to children.

What we deliver

In School Years 6 and 7 the focus is on how gangs work; how they recruit, and how they exploit young people. To prevent violence, we need to stop young people becoming gang involved. To do this we debunk the mythology that gangs protect you, give you a sense of belonging, allow you to earn respect and live a glamorous lifestyle.

Social Media use by young people is covered in depth. For Primary students, sensitive issues relating to social media, grooming, cyber bullying, gaming and inappropriate images are examined and young people are made aware of the law surrounding these issues and are empowered to report abuse if they encounter it. For Secondary students the aim of the workshop is to reduce

peer-on-peer bullying and understand sexting, grooming and how to get support. Students are encouraged to recognise that what happens online can hurt them offline.

In School Years 8, 9 and 10 the focus moves to the relationships young people have with police (via stop and search scenarios) and with each other (both on-line and off-line) with a particular focus on sexual exploitation and gendered power dynamics. Sexting and cyberbullying are explored in depth, as are issues around 'consent' in a sexual relationship.

A bespoke session on Knife Crime is delivered in Further Education Colleges. Students explore why people stab: whether this be through fear, for financial gain, for protection, through criminal exploitation by gangs, as a result of the drug supply or for retaliation.

This session makes it clear that a wide range of people are affected by knife crime and how it devastates the lives of young people, their families and the professionals who work with young people.

We also have a fantastic Professional Session which seeks to educate professionals about 'how gangs work' and how gang culture influences and adversely affects young people. The aim is to identify what gangs are and how they differ from peer groups. Delivered by highly experienced facilitators, the session examines how gangs are organized, how they make money, and how they recruit. It identifies how violence is used by gangs and gang members and establishes how gangs and gang members 'brand' themselves both on-line and off-line, exploring 'rap-trap' videos and the growing concerns relating to 'county lines' drug dealing.

Parents and Carers explore issues relating to social media, sexting, online grooming, gangs, serious youth violence and conversations relating to sex and sexuality. The session celebrates the fact that the vast majority of young people lead positive lives, but also promotes active parental engagement, boundary setting, and the importance of collaboration and communication between families, schools, and communities to end gang and serious youth violence.

Who we are

Growing Against Violence is unique in that it is a multi-disciplinary, cross profession partnership seeking to prevent violence and exploitation. The Board of Trustees brings together senior professionals from trauma surgery, academia, police, law, accounting, management consultancy and information technology. The curriculum is co-authored by Professor James Densley, one of the world's leading criminologists and Dr Michelle Lyttle-Storrod. Facilitators of sessions are drawn from a diverse background including retired police officers, teachers, youth workers and those from a theatre in education background.

The curriculum has been statistically proven via a longitudinal outcome evaluation to improve confidence of young people in Police and reduce adherence of young people to the street code.

What next?

Those involved in developing, delivering and providing the strategic oversight of GAV have agreed to provide regular updates to this publication to provide insights gained in collaborating

to address youth violence. We hope this will be of interest to you.

Allen Davis
Chair of the Board of Trustees
and Co-Founder,
Growing Against Violence



www.growingagainstv.org.uk

Bookings via:
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Allen Davis



Tackling Knife Crime: The Government's Focused Approach

The Rt Hon Chris Philp MP, Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire

As the Home Office Minister for Crime and Policing, I see the awful effects of knife crime.

I speak to family members numbed by the grief of losing a loved one.

I see communities shuddering from seeing violence play out on their streets.

And I hear about senseless attacks from across the country involving a knife.

All of this has hardened my determination to reduce knife crime,

particularly when it affects young people.

Now this is a complex issue which requires thoughtful consideration.

Knife crime, homicide and youth violence has fallen under this government. But everyone needs to feel safer in their homes, their schools and on their streets.

We understand this, and after talking at length with anti-knife crime organisations, are going further to educate and deter young people from carrying weapons.

We recently amended the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act that so every adult convicted of a second knife possession offence, unless in exceptional circumstances, will get at least 6 months in prison.

We recently launched a public consultation with the intention of banning machetes and other dangerous knives which have no practical use.

While machetes may have legitimate uses in gardening or agriculture, there is no reason someone should brandish one on our streets.

We announced our aim to ban these so called 'Rambo' and 'zombie' style knives.

Trauma surgeons have spoken of their horror treating wounds inflicted by these weapons, which have no purpose on the streets other than causing unimaginable harm to victims and sow fear.

Another proposal in the consultation looks to ban the sale of these weapons online or in shops. And we are looking to ensure that anyone who sells a dangerous knife to a child will face a bigger penalty – up to two years in prison.

And when police officers find dangerous knives in homes, we will give them powers to make it easier to seize and destroy the blades they find.

Tougher sentencing and penalties for carrying weapons must be matched by positive steps to educate people against carrying knives.

The government is using every tool it has to do this. It has provided £170 million for Violence Reduction Units, a programme which identifies and combats the key causes of youth violence in twenty badly affected neighbourhoods in England and Wales.

Local partners in the community – in healthcare, policing and education – guide at risk children away from crime with workshops, therapy and sports.

These partnerships have prevented an estimated 136,000 violent offences in England and Wales.

While this number may sound arbitrary, it represents a wave of young people deciding to not carry a weapon, and instead, look towards a more positive future.

Violence Reduction Units are just one of the Home Office funded programmes which aim to reduce knife crime.

The statistics show the plan is working, but this requires continued collaboration between partners and renewed vigour to send a clear message that you cannot carry a knife.

The Rt Hon Chris Philp MP
Minister for Crime,
Policing and Fire



The Rt Hon Chris Philp MP



PING PING PING

Johnny Bolderson, Senior Service Manager County Lines Support & Rescue Service, Catch22

A simple sound, a sound that that holds no meaning, a sound that can be no more than a nuisance to a stranger. For the young person holding that phone it can mean the start or end of a unescapable journey.

A county line is a multi-million pound business model that requires logistical planning on a national scale. To understand the risks, it poses to the children, young people and vulnerable adults we need to understand how

a county line works. A county line refers to the phone line used to coordinate the movement of illegal products across the country, namely drugs. Various vulnerable groups are exploited to effectively run a county line from children and young people transporting drugs across the country to vulnerable adults whose homes are taken over by gangs as a base to deal drugs from. Social media is the base for coordination of movement and delivery, using Snapchat in particular to instruct individuals of pick-ups or drop offs. The attraction to Snapchat is the belief that messages pop up and disappear without trace. In reality, and with the cooperation of the social media company, messages can be recovered.

It's a misconception that Grooming and exploitation has a different meaning or different tactics for a county line organised gang than it does for anything else. Let's clear this up now. Exploitation is exploitation, you can attach any shiny new heading over it, but at the end of the day child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation is exploitation! The methods and tactics of recruitment are the more or less the same.

So, what techniques will be used to recruit someone into working for a county line. Well, there is no definitive answer, and no one set technique. There are known models used to exploit young people and children, however these will be dependent on the individual young person and their needs, as will the timescales in which a young person is recruited. It is known that vulnerable young people are more likely to be exploited. However no young person is exempt from being a victim of exploitation. Exploiters will

offer a sense of security, a belonging to their gang, social stature, and money. All of which are very appealing to a teenage brain driven by excitement and limited ability to assess risk, unable to picture themselves as a victim, but rather someone who is part of something, earning good money and in a position to work their way up to be an elder.

We need to see what life looks like for young people, see the world their growing up through their eyes. The pressure placed on the shoulders of young people growing up in a world of status and ego, can have frightening results.

A MOBILE PHONE holds open the door ajar for any vulnerable person to peak into a world of high risk and violence. Online gaming, social media, chat rooms can insert themselves into a young person's life to create fear and sadness. It also prevents any respite from the constant communication from those looking to exploit.

Why does someone get groomed? Let's ask that question. What makes one person more vulnerable than another to exploitation. It can be different extremes, somebody isolated without positive role models that longs to be part of something, to a child or young adult that believes a county line will bring status and wealth instantly. The common thread in both sides is inclusion, being part of something, something that requires a action that only they can deliver, thus belonging and need being filled. This creates that loyalty and admiration to their exploiter, 'they need me' 'only I can do it', once the exploiter has loyalty, then they build fear into the relationship, fear of failure and fear of consequences from failing.

Now the exploited are caught in a cycle of expectation and fear to deliver. This constant feeling of fear can result in bigger risks and bigger punishments. We will never understand what this feels like. It will be the centre of their world and everything else will start to slip away.

Understanding the currency that is used to entice the young and vulnerable paramount to spotting the signs for parents that possible Grooming is taking place. New trainers, mobile phones, clothes and new consoles could be used to create that pressured loyalty, these items suddenly appearing could be an indicator of exploitation. This currency creates pressures and also creates a 'hidden debt'; a hidden debt is a debt that is placed on an individual without their knowledge but expected to payback the gift. The gift giving creates that loyalty bond which then leads to pressure to move drugs across the country, this is the beginning of debt bandage.

What is a concern is the value that an exploited person will put on their own life when working for a county line. Majority do not expect to see 19 years of age, this is because they understand the odds of likely receiving punishment for failure, payback from a rival postcode or lengthy prison sentence. But the relationship is already in place with their exploiter, and the fear and loyalty increases a bond with other exploited children within the same county line. This togetherness is the strongest and positive bond they have in their life, the chance of returning to a broken home, a school or a Saturday job earning minimum wage will be close to zero. So professional agencies need to be proactive, and adapt their services

to the need of exploited children and young adults, having a cut-off age of 18, so all professionals that have built that rapport and started work must stop those interventions immediately after their 18th birthday. This will immediately create that sense of abandonment again, the same feeling they had that made them a target to exploitation. This is the cycle that will repeat unless we adapt to the need of our young people.

Johnny Bolderson

Senior Service Manager County
Lines Support & Rescue Service,
Catch22

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Johnny Bolderson

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In order for a young person to eligible for rescue they must be:

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- Found in an exploitative situation relating to County Lines.



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Risk vs Reward: My fight against knife crime

Anthony Olaseinde, CEO, Always an Alternative

From a young age I could never understand why some people were dealt different hands in life; why couldn't some people see? walk? talk? Why is that person sad? why are they angry? I genuinely felt upset for them, and I would almost feel guilty as they didn't do anything to be like that.

It took me years to understand why I felt like that, but it left me with a life lesson. There are some things you cannot change, but there are plenty of things you can do to help.

Unfortunately, by the time I was of an age to help others, I found myself needing help. With nobody there I made myself a promise; once I figured out where I went wrong, I would prevent others from making the same mistakes as I did.

It took me 24 years but I did it, I took myself away from all the negative distractions. Started to attend college to get the grades I needed to go to university. Went on to Sheffield Hallam University, and during my placement year I started a security business, which

made enough money to allow me to create the anti-knife crime campaign, Keep Sheffield Stainless.

It was called this due to the links that Sheffield has with stainless steel and it is the same material used to make knives. I chose to keep the campaign local because I was able to learn if the rise in knife crime was because of gang culture or, it was a problem amongst young people. Once I had a clear understanding on the magnitude of knife crime in Sheffield and the amount of young people getting involved. I created a workshop to deliver to young people in the hope that I could educate them around the dangers of knife crime. I took a while to perfect the delivery as I used a trial-and-error approach, that was heavily swayed on the input from the young people. This was because I knew that if the educational workshops were to be successful, it needed the voice input of young people.

I noticed that there wasn't many places for people to dispose of their weapons anonymously and safely, this led me to

design the UK's first portable weapon amnesty bin. The bins were adapted with wheels and large brackets on the back to easily move around. Before you ask! Of course they could get broken into, what cannot? What we did to mitigate that risk, was build a good relationships in the community and empty them regularly so there was not a big build-up of weapons. The next question is normally, do they work? in short, yes. We did some fund raising and we now have 8, which have allowed me to prevent over 500 weapons from reaching the streets. Including firearms and live ammunition.

As I engaged more young people in workshops, and talks, I noted that the knife was not the issue here. You could put any weapon in their hands and outcome would be the same. This led me to step back from knife crime and look at my work from a different angle.

Around this time, I was suffering with; flashbacks of knife crime attacks I was being sent via social media. I would avoid large knives, have mood swings, become irritable and have frequent emotional outbursts. It just wasn't me; something wasn't right. I'm full of joy, positive vibes and getting things done, but I felt like all of my energy had been taken away and I was being followed by a dark cloud.

After a long talk with a close friend, I realised that this because of the negative energy surrounding knife crime; people were going to prison, people were getting injured, people were dying, yet I felt I was the only one that was trying to prevent it. It was all having such a negative impact on my mental health. I later find out that I was suffering from Secondary trauma. This disorder is where you have the same symptoms of some that has seen a traumatic incident first hand, but you learn about the incident indirectly;

conversation, a video, an audio recording or even an image.

Always an Alternative worn born from this conversation. A way for me to continue to engage with young people but focused less on the knife, which was the end result and more on the deep-rooted issues by challenging their mindset around serious violence, gang culture and antisocial behaviour.

Over the years I had collected over 300 weapons, both through face-to-face collections and weapons amnesty bins. I wanted to try and change the way that people viewed knife crime by taking these things that tear families apart and create something beautiful and motivational. So, I asked Jason Heppenstall, a well-known metal sculpture to create a tree with the weapons collected from the amnesty bins: named the tree of opportunity. To celebrate this, I held an exhibition along with art work from local artists and letters and poems from those who were unfortunate enough to feel the wrath of knife crime first hand. The exhibition was brilliant, it gained a lot of attention. Unfortunately, there was not much engagement from young people, which was quite upsetting.

After asking some of the young people that I worked with the reason for this. It was clear that they did not feel comfortable leaving their areas where they felt safe. So, a different way of thinking was required; A portable version of the exhibition! To travel around schools, colleges etc. The exhibition was awarded funding to make 6 visits to educational facilities in Sheffield. Part of the exhibition was me going in to do a talk on the exhibition and the dangers of knife crime. Additionally, we had a local acting teacher go in and do role play on difficult conversations with friends, in this case it

was carrying a knife but the skills that the students developed would allow them to have this discussion with their friends around any delicate topic.

Due to the success of the youth tour, we were funded to visit 10 further educational facilities. The project in total gave access to over 45,000 people including staff. I spoke to over 3,000 students, but most importantly the youth tour created positive conversations around knife crime that allowed students to feel comfortable talking to the staff about the topic.

Even though education is my way of trying to get thorough to young people, I like to find alternative ways to engage them. This could be with arts, with the exhibition, performing arts as with the youth tour, I will try anything to try and get through to that one young person that needs support.

Our last project, Victims Voices was formed to allow people to see the devastation that knife crime causes through the words of families and friends of victims. The reasoning behind this project was because we often feel a disconnect between knife crime and people and hear a lot of "it won't happen to me" attitude.

The focal point of the project was a documentary, where family members and friends were interviewed. Recording these conversations was really heart breaking. I have never been so emotionally exhausted during any other project. However, I believe that the documentary truly brings to light, the pain that people go through, and that, in fact, anyone can be affected by knife crime.

We intend to do 5 more episodes of the series, one more around the victims' families and friends; one focussing on

victims that have survived a knife attack; one focussing on the perpetrators; one focussing on the perpetrators families and finally, the last episode will look into at what people are doing to prevent knife crime on our streets and plans from the police, health and the government; how they intend to get it under control.

Anthony Olaseinde
CEO, Always an Alternative



www.alwaysanalternative.org.uk



Anthony Olaseinde

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Adam Ballard

The Real Fight Starts Here

Adam Ballard, Youth Intervention Specialist, Gloves Not Gunz

The essence of starting our organisation, "Gloves Not Gunz", was to use sport to divert young people away from carrying and using weapons in their community. As with our own situation, there are many reasons why young people habitually carry knives, and sadly use them to come out on top of scenarios that quite honestly have usually been overshadowed in a plot of catastrophism, and unduly escalated out of control.

Lack of positive provisions, lack of prosperous activities, socio-economic status, negative peer association, boredom, are only a few of the reasons that are widely used by media, professionals, adults and those that have never taken the time to converse with those involved in 'knife crime' to give a justification of why it is on the rise. However, although all of the above will definitely have an effect on young

people and their decision making, the real answer, that I seem to find time and time again when working with these brilliant young people, is 'LACK OF PURPOSE'. This might be a failure to be stimulated in the academic arena, or financial barriers getting in the way of involvement in positive sporting enrichment activities. Until young people have access to 'Free Sport' they will continue to search for a purpose.

There are so many important themes and skills within sport that are vital for a young person to develop and prosper in their day to day lives. At our organisation, our community sport sessions have fostered a family environment where anyone that walks through the famous 'Gloves Not Gunz' doors will be met with our three C's - (Compassion, Commitment and Consistency). We show compassion to people regardless of their situation,

gender, race, or social status. We are committed to young people in every sphere of their life, proudly offering a wrap-around network of support and most importantly we are consistent in our approach. Consistency is paramount when it comes to working with young people who might be setting off on the 'wrong' track in terms of carrying and using knives.

Using the sport of boxing for example we can look at the transferable themes/skills that can be translated into someone's everyday life. Among these are discipline, decision-making, working in pressurized environments, problem solving, risk management, and going outside of your comfort zone. There are many more examples. A lot of those that are involved in knife crime do not have these skill sets, and make their decisions based on reactive aggression and poor emotional regulation. This is why it is so important to encourage young people to take part in sporting activities. The benefits are so impactful on not only the physical/mental health and wellbeing, but in some cases literally whether they will ultimately survive.

As well as purpose, creating a safe environment is integral to enable a young person to flourish in their chosen sport. It is important to offer both recreational and competitive pathways in order to serve everyone's individual appetite.

We have found that offering additional personal development workshops to our sporting sessions really help raise awareness and education to the topic of knife crime. We make these workshops as interactive as possible and encourage real and honest conversations with our youth without fear of judgment. The reality is there

are thousands of professionals with expert knowledge that may have come from lived and learned experiences. However, often young people get taken out of the loop, and therefore the knowledge and experiences they have are often overlooked when it comes to creating anti knife crime programs. I feel that young people should be at the forefront of this conversation as they are the ones that are primarily affected. Quite obviously, knife crime doesn't just impact the perpetrators and victims.

Finally, I would like to say that throughout my 20 years of being a sports coach/youth intervention specialist, I have found that using sport to engage with those that are at risk of becoming both perpetrators and victims of knife crime has saved hundreds of lives through giving our youth a purpose. I think the most important take-away is that not everyone who walks into your sports club is going to be an amazing athlete or wants to compete at any level, and that is OK. As long as you create a safe environment for young people where they can interact with each other and express themselves you will find success in what you are doing.

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Communities Hold the Key to Tackling Violent Crime

Adam Hawksbee, Deputy Director, Onward
& Shivani H Menon, Researcher on Levelling Up, Onward

In 2005, Glasgow was ruled by its street gangs. Around 170 such gangs existed across the city, collectively employing nearly 3,500 members aged between 11 and 23.¹ The violence was so dire that someone fell victim to a serious facial injury once every six hours. The Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU), born out of Strathclyde, was a direct response to these surging rates of violent crime.

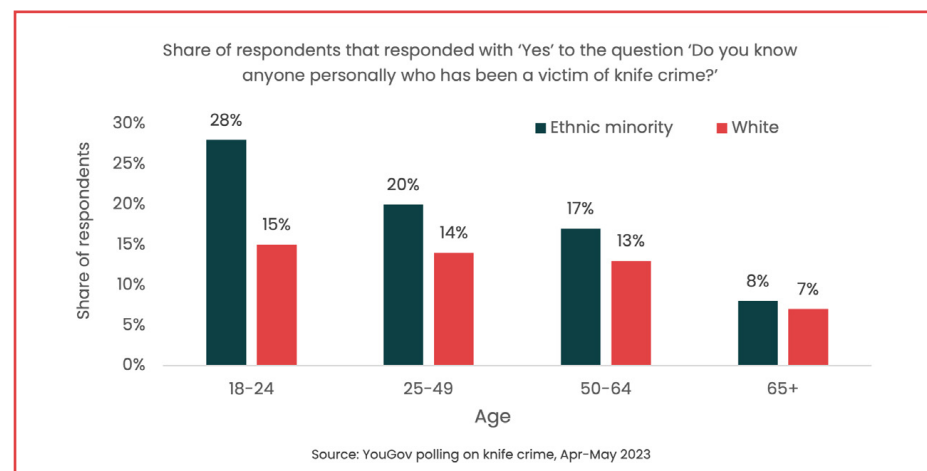
In October 2008, two police officers Karyn McCluskey and John Carnochan from the violence reduction unit devised a scheme that would go on to turn Glasgow's fate around. They invited the gang members to a community meeting, a 'call-in,' alongside those that had directly been affected by the violence. This included former gang members, mothers of victims, and a local surgeon that operated on stab wounds.

Each party expressed their grievances, and at the end of the meeting, gang members were handed offers of support to combat addiction and seek employment, education, or training.

Failing to accept this offer, the police committed to tackling the violence through arresting the perpetrators. This Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV), ultimately saw rates of violent crime in Glasgow fall by half and homicide fall by as much as 90% over the past decade.²

The key to the SVRU's strategy was to acknowledge that collaborative efforts from the police, local government, health organisations, and other community members are crucial to tackling crime. Following their success in Scotland, similar units were nationally scaled to 18 areas across England and Wales in 2019. They save approximately £4.10 for every £1 of funding allocated.³

Onward's own recent work *Levelling Up Locally* underscores how crime is symptomatic of wider socio-economic challenges.⁴ The places we visited faced multiple disadvantages - including high poverty rates, health, and education deprivation, crumbling public services, and fragmented families. These challenges were mutually reinforcing, producing a complex web of issues



that collectively and independently contributed to rising crime.

Worryingly, and as the situation in Glasgow highlights, it is young people who are disproportionately contributing to criminal activity. 18-25 year olds make up less than one in ten of the UK population, but were responsible for over a third of all police recorded crime cases in 2019. A major driver of youth violence is exposure: living with a gang member and having a friend in a gang increases the risk of juvenile delinquency. But exposure also means that young people easily fall victim to violent crime. Recent polling on knife crime sees those aged 18-24 affected at much higher rates than other age groups. These differences are particularly stark for ethnic minority communities.

Efforts to tackle violent crime must make greater use of community-oriented solutions that address root causes of violent crime: poverty, family breakdown, and deprivation. Ultimately, this provides the strongest protection against a life of crime. But to be effective, these must be deployed alongside more formal control methods where appropriate, and target

both the individual and their immediate surroundings.

There are a number of relatively low-cost and scalable community-based services that target violent crime, particularly among young people.

Starting at the very beginning, early years nurture plays a key role in ensuring that young children develop the right psychosocial skills. But children that undergo 'adverse childhood experiences' (ACEs) - such as parental violence, substance abuse, and incarceration - are at much higher risk of being associated with youth violence. And for those with multiple adverse experiences, this risk is even greater.⁵ A study conducted in Seattle found that a child exposed to seven or more ACEs was 13 times more likely to be recruited into a gang, compared to a child exposed to only a single risk factor.⁶ Addressing this requires policies to target not just the individual, but the family unit.

A London South Bank University project that asked young people about their experiences joining gangs highlights the importance of families:

"I've got some friends who are gang members, and they have no one at home supporting or helping them with anything... money, schoolwork, general life support – their parents just don't give it to them for some reason." - Young person, Aged under 18, from Tower Hamlets.⁷

Families provide the first line of support for anyone vulnerable. But some families need additional help in serving this foundational role. 'Family Hubs' provide a package of support services to disadvantaged families - including health, education, and early years support. Local authorities must prioritise accelerating their rollout. But even within existing Hubs, better targeting is needed. Aligning each child's pupil identification numbers with hub records can help trace an individual's support requirements across a range of services and ensure that no one is left behind.

Further in a child's life, schools play an important role in shaping personal and cognitive skills. Experiences at school, both educational and otherwise, mould key behaviours. The pivotal role teachers play in tackling violent crime is well understood by the public. When polled what policies they would support to tackle knife crime, educational programmes in schools garnered the most support - between 73-88%, higher than policies that targeted imprisonment, increased policing, and weapon surrenders.⁸

After-school activities such as sports clubs have a proven track record in productively diverting young people away from criminal activity. In Oldham, social entrepreneur Moinul Islam runs an afterschool sports club 'Outta Skool' that offers classes in boxing, football, and the South Asian sport 'kabbadi' to local youths. In inner-city areas, well-designed 'Multi Use Game Areas' give young people

a safe space to participate in different sporting activities. The Hackney Wick Through Young Eyes report spoke to young people about these areas and the majority reported it was their favourite part of the neighbourhood.⁹

The public realm has a major role to play in tackling crime. Dilapidated town centres and high streets are commonplace in the country's neglected neighbourhoods and serve as a breeding ground for criminal activity. But local authorities possess the levers to ensure that public spaces serve the greater good. Legal powers such as Section 215 Notices and High Street Rental Auctions must be deployed more extensively and effectively. Smaller plots of derelict land can be repurposed into 'Meanwhile Use' spaces - temporary installations that benefit the community, including art displays, community gardens, and leisure spaces.

But poorly designed public spaces can foster instead of prevent crime. Parks with limited visibility, poor street lighting, and the lack of long-term maintenance plans act as major crime-enablers. An inspiring initiative by the London School of Economics (LSE) and Brent Council demonstrates how public spaces can be made safer and more inclusive for young people. The 'Samovar Space' was designed by young LSE Cities apprentices aged 16-24 from the borough. These were young people that were 'too old for playgrounds but too young for restaurants and bars,' that applied what they learnt from the programme to create usable spaces.¹⁰

But efforts to trace youth violence must transcend the physical realm. While the core focus of street gangs was previously about territoriality, today they are about financial motives.¹¹ Violent crime has become more closely associated with drug and weapons offences, and gang

recruitment and negotiations have shifted from the street corner to social media. Scotland Yard's 'Social Media Squad' that monitors gang activity online is a step in the right direction. They forecast future violence and intervene to de-escalate gang violence.¹² But greater safeguards are still needed to protect minors against the perils of violence on media platforms.

These community interventions hold great promise, yet the detail lies in delivery. The Glasgow mission was successful because residents trusted their local institutions to deliver on their support. But trust in Britain's public institutions, including the police, are at an all-time low. By working alongside public authorities, communities can rebuild trust through efficient service delivery. Ultimately, it is only communities that hold the key to tackling violent crime.

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Shaming Symphonies: Gangs, Music, Social Media, and Youth Violence. Sharing the Perspective of an Independent Expert Witness as a Catalyst for Vital Discussion

Michael Railton, Director, ContexKey

Since I entered this arena in 2015, the debate between Art and Music produced in furtherance of a gang mentality has dominated the discussion. However, what remains unexplored is what lies beneath the surface of this seemingly glossy entertainment facade.

For those unfamiliar with the subject, Drill is a genre of music, like Jazz, Funk, and Dance. It emerged as

a sub-genre of Hip-Hop in Chicago, America, in 2012, and quickly spread to South London shortly after.

The genre's defining characteristics include unapologetically raw, highly confrontational, and provocative lyrics that often vividly depict violence involving weapons and other forms of criminal activity. While Drill has faced criticism for glorifying illegal actions, many of its fans view it as

an authentic expression of the harsh realities experienced in disadvantaged communities.

Since it arrived in Brixton, South London, around 2014, the genre has undergone significant evolution. Aspiring artists now find themselves pursued by music label executives who offer substantial sums of money for their artistic talent. The life-changing opportunities and experiences are far beyond the reach of individuals from the very communities these aspiring artists originate from.

Discussions within the industry predominantly revolve around life-changing opportunities, achieving chart success, and improving one's overall existence. However, this is merely the 'front of house' perspective, only scratching the surface of a much deeper issue.

The focus of my policing career revolved around what lies beneath this surface, although it didn't begin with the music—it began on the streets.

Shepherds Bush. Where it started...

Let's go back to 2014. I was a fresh-faced Metropolitan Police Officer stationed in West London, specializing in neighbourhood policing. It was an exhilarating experience, filled with memorable moments. However, alongside those fond memories, I encountered numerous heart-wrenching incidents. The tragic loss of life, and life-altering injuries inflicted upon the youths I deeply cared for still haunts me to this day.

Witnessing the squandered potential among these young individuals was particularly challenging for me, and coming to terms with it has been an ongoing process. I was a highly proactive police officer, always eager

to be out in the community, confronting crime head-on. My ability to remember faces served me well. I was formerly a Proactive Intelligence CCTV Operator, which made my expertise sought-after by many teams and operations.

When I wasn't patrolling on my bike, I would often find myself being driven around in an unmarked car or coordinating operations from the Council's CCTV Control Room alongside dedicated and driven professionals. Around 2015, I truly began to feel a sense of belonging in my community. I became attuned to its unique rhythm. However, it was around this time that I started sensing shifts in the atmosphere that would periodically descend upon the area.

Perhaps it was my growing familiarity that allowed me to perceive these changes. Or maybe the climate had already taken hold, but like many others, I had been oblivious to it. I could sense a certain tension in the air when I interacted with the community, and even through the lens of a CCTV camera.

The behaviour of the youths I regularly engaged with underwent a noticeable transformation. They would gather along the walls of their 'Front Line', a row of shops they frequented, adopting a vigilant stance. These periods of unease often preceded or followed violent incidents, although not exclusively. Initially, I couldn't fully comprehend it; the tension was selective, affecting some individuals more visibly than others.

It felt as though sharks were circling their small island of refuge, fully aware that these sharks had learned to walk. I have witnessed large-scale fights with weapons, stabbings, firearm

discharges, drug-related kidnappings, gang-related 'Ride Outs', and 'Lurkings'. I have also reviewed countless cases post-incident.

Frequently, I questioned how a young person I had felt completely at ease with, someone I had seen engaging in positive social interactions, could suddenly become the suspect in extremely violent offences. Refusing to accept that it was solely due to my naivety, I embarked on a quest for answers to my lingering questions.

"The beat of a butterfly's wing can alter the course of a tornado..." - Chaos Theory

The atmospheric shifts I had grown accustomed to served as early warning signals for an impending 'tornado'. The impact of which began to be felt in West London around 2015. It would often touch down in Shepherd's Bush after dark, then make its way to neighbouring Ladbroke Grove, and vice versa. I became familiar with these atmospheric changes and bore witness to the aftermath they left behind each time they struck.

Large groups of hooded figures would descend upon both areas, leaving young individuals fighting for their lives. Determined to understand its trajectory, I delved into the online space. It was there that I truly grasped the immense power of the butterfly's wingbeat.

But what butterfly am I referring to? It is the manipulation of music and social media, fuelling a self-destructive cycle of 'us versus them' one-upmanship. Even the slightest flutter of a cruel lyric or a bullying social media post can unleash a tornado that robs lives, inflicts trauma, and perpetuates a climate of fear.

Unfortunately, this chaos is often tolerated and disguised as a pro-social endeavour. Much-needed discussions are clouded by dominant arguments about Free Speech, Artistic Expression, and the demonization of our youth and communities. What is often overlooked is the undeniable power of this chaos. It can whip up an atmosphere so unforgiving that it can alter a young person's life trajectory, cloud their judgment, and impede their ability to make sound decisions.

Hats and lenses...

Throughout my career as an Officer and an independent Expert Witness in this field, I have been privileged to gain valuable insights into the nature of violence. One of the most striking observations I have made is that many young individuals in our communities wear multiple 'hats'. They can be avid sports enthusiasts, regular attendees of religious settings, caring siblings, sons or daughters, and aspiring music artists, all at the same time.

Our young people navigate teenage years by adopting varying personas. This is not a new phenomenon. All of us naturally adopt different personas depending on the context - a 'work version', a 'social circle version', and a 'family version' of ourselves.

One persona that some of our young people wear is that of a gang affiliate or associate. Importantly, this does not negate their other identities; it can coexist with them. The adoption of this persona often stems from pro-social connections, such as childhood friendships, school acquaintances, or neighbours. Unfortunately, in many cases, this persona emerges from the exploitation of social deprivation, fear, and an innate desire to survive.



Sometimes, it is inherited from siblings, parents, or extended family members. In essence, this is not fundamentally different from pro-social identities.

However, embracing the gang persona comes with a significant price. In today's online world, adopting such is displayed prominently, akin to an illuminated billboard. It acts as a beacon, attracting like-minded individuals. Combined with the pursuit of the historical conventions of an unapologetically raw music genre, our youth often find themselves in an arena where 'relevance' and 'popularity' are measured on a scale of truth, exaggeration, and 'cap' - *slang for a false statement*. Falsehoods or exaggerated claims about their lives are quickly exposed and scrutinized online. The comment section, likes, dislikes, views, and follows carry great weight and can cause young people to struggle to maintain their footing on a slippery slope toward a self-destructive cycle where art imitates life. The toxic fog emanating from this persona impacts those who associate with them, the communities they belong to, and the places they frequent.

There is no winning when winning is built on the foundations of another's

misery and trauma.

Those who seek out these individuals to test or challenge them follow the trail of lingering fog. The personas of the avid sportsperson, caring sibling, and aspiring musician are there, but faded. Emanating through the haze is the beacon of the victim's gang persona. It is this persona that they are targeting. The aggressor is led by the weight of the same persona which pushes all consciousness of the other pro-social personas, out of their mind, as they zone in. It is not a pro-social persona they adopt when they exit a stolen vehicle armed with a knife with the intent to harm another.

The persona of the gang affiliate or associate is a burden. It distorts their perception, preventing them from seeing the other 'hats' their intended targets wear. It also erodes their sense of consequence, empathy, and judgment.

The person standing before them is believed to be the one who has previously hurt them or has taunted and belittled them in the virtual realm. Their tunnel vision excludes mindfulness, and mistakes often occur in identifying the intended target. However, these errors go unnoticed as

the person in their sight instinctively flees to preserve their safety. The fleeing youth unwittingly reinforces the assailant's misguided belief.

Unfortunately, reality often dawns too late, after irreparable damage has been done.

"Not Life Changing / Life-threatening..."

In the aftermath of a violent incident, when the victim is in the care of our exceptional National Health Service, there is one phrase that brings a sense of relief: 'Not life-threatening, not life-changing'. While this sounds positive, it has always felt incomplete to me.

This assessment only considers the *physical* well-being of the victim. What about the potential mental trauma, and the long-term effects on their mental health? I have witnessed individuals undergo profound changes after experiencing violence. Victims of knife crime can turn into carriers of knives themselves. Once carefree and cheerful, these youths become hyper-aroused, paranoid, and barely recognizable due to the pervasive climate of fear that surrounds them.

Naturally, the focus is rightly placed on the victims of violence, and it often stirs controversy when I bring the perpetrators into the conversation. However, as humans, we have evolved to such an extent that raw violence leaves a lasting impact on both the victim and the perpetrator.

It does not matter how strongly some of our youth may believe they are 'built for this life'; they are not immune to the devastating psychological effects of knife crime. The up-close brutality of such acts will undoubtedly affect the mental well-being of the individuals wielding the weapons, whether they

acknowledge it or not.

Unmanaged or poorly managed trauma experienced by both victims and perpetrators has far-reaching consequences for the wider community. It ripples through society, affecting not only those directly involved but also those who live in fear and witness the aftermath of these acts. The impact is felt on multiple levels, and it is crucial to address and manage the psychological consequences alongside the physical injuries to foster healing and prevent further harm.

The line to be drawn...

There is a clear distinction that needs to be made between art that reflects the artist's experience of society and malicious manipulation of art to promote self-destructive, violent, and potentially fatal mentalities. Lyrics or social media posts that glorify near-fatal violence or maliciously taunt those who survive the victims of fatal violence, step over the line of historical conventions of an unapologetically raw music genre. They exploit hyper-local and hyper-personal contexts to target shame and trauma receptors, causing significant harm to the intended recipients, and roll the dice for a physical retaliatory reaction.

To truly understand the impact of such content, we must put ourselves in the shoes of the victims of brutal violence or those who mourn the loss of young lives taken by violence. Empathy is essential in recognizing the difference between artistic expression and harmful messages that perpetuate violence, trauma and shame.

Indeed, as an expert witness, your role is to provide the court with valuable insights and a comprehensive understanding of the multi-layered and complex reality surrounding a case. This includes shedding light on

the intersection of the online space and historic violent feuds, as it can significantly impact the motivations and circumstances of the defendant.

It is important to recognize that individuals who find themselves in the dock have historically worn multiple 'hats', representing different aspects of their lives. They may have experienced adverse childhood experiences and adverse community environments, which contribute to their overall circumstances. Their online and musical presence can be vital explanatory evidence and may be a focal point in the trial. It is essential, however, to view it as just one version of the individual that they adopt daily.

By providing the court with a nuanced understanding of the defendant's various personas and the influences that have shaped their actions, you contribute to a more comprehensive assessment of their motivations and circumstances. This aids the court in making a fair and informed judgment based on a holistic understanding of the individual before them.

It is important to recognize that those who commit violent acts often do so as a result of adopting belief systems they hold dear at that time. However, we also have a generation of youths who have become desensitized to brutal violence, pursuing it as a form of entertainment as a spectator or participant. While we may seek to understand their motivations, it is crucial to address the underlying factors that contribute to such desensitization and challenge the adoption of harmful beliefs.

Working in this field takes a toll on those dedicated to youth safety, leaving traces of every contact with trauma. The commitment to protecting young lives persists despite the judgmental labels

that have been placed upon my colleagues and me. As professionals, we understand the weight of labels and strive to provide context and understanding rather than perpetuate stereotypes.

This article is my rallying cry for change, to create a breeze that can steer our youth away from the destructive path they may be following.

Amidst the tangled threads of the web, the butterfly effect unfolds. Cruel lyrics intertwined with hyperlocal context, amplified by the reach of social media. This dangerous dance blurs the lines between art and life, with words bleeding into action. – ContextKey 2023

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Manipulation of the Online Space*



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