



MILLION

**Carrying Knives and Bladed Weapons:
A submission to the All Party Parliamentary
Group on Child and Youth Crime**

**From 11 MILLION led by the Children's
Commissioner for England**

May 2008



**"The 11 MILLION children
and young people in
England have a voice"**

Children's Commissioner for
England, Professor Sir Albert
Aynsley-Green

Table of Contents



1) Who are we?	p. 4
2) Introduction	p. 5
3) What have children and young people told us about the carrying of knives?	p. 6
4) What 11 MILLION will do over the next year	p. 8

1 Who are we?



How were we established?

11 MILLION is a national organisation led by the Children's Commissioner for England, Professor Sir Al Aynsley-Green. The Children's Commissioner is a position created by the Children Act 2004.



What do we do?

We have a statutory role to promote the views and interests of children and young people across England. This gives us a unique role in bringing children's ideas into the centre of the political process

Meeting the challenges of the Children Act 2004

The Children Act requires the Children's Commissioner to be concerned with the five aspects of well-being covered in *Every Child Matters* – the national government initiative aimed at improving outcomes for all children. It also requires us to have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC underpins our work and informs which areas and issues on which we focus our efforts.



Our long-term goals

Children and young people see significant improvements in their wellbeing and can freely enjoy their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Children and young people are more highly valued by adult society.



Main project

Every year, we have a main project which is decided by children and young people. The lead project for 2008-09 is 'Gun and Knife Crime'.

Spotlight areas

Our 'spotlights' are the areas where we will influence emerging policy and debate. Our spotlights for 2008-09 are Respect and Discrimination, Asylum and Happy and Healthy.

2 Introduction



This brief submission explains the work that 11 MILLION will be undertaking on gun and knife crime during the business year 2008-09. It sets out how this work has come about and how the participation of children and young people in what we do will underpin it.

11 MILLION will welcome all opportunities over the coming months to discuss the underlying issues and our emerging findings.

3 What have children and young people told us about the carrying of knives?



Bullying, intimidation, fear and violence

During his first two years in post, the Children's Commissioner focused on bullying. He did so primarily because children and young people repeatedly raised it as one of their main concerns, something that was seriously affecting their sense of safety and wellbeing. What he heard anecdotally was backed empirically by numerous surveys among children and young people who reported high levels of fear and peer intimidation (for example, Ofsted's TellUs and TellUs 2 surveys).

From 2005 to 2006 the Commissioner worked with children and young people on new support materials, and commissioned new research. It was clear from all the available evidence that patterns of aggressive and anti-social behaviour can become established early on, and that schools and pre-school settings have a vital role identifying vulnerable children in need of targeted help, as well as providing an environment in which all children can develop necessary social and emotional skills. Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) is the main programme through which schools can deliver this support, although there are many other opportunities and approaches. Peer support schemes have been proven to improve school climate and pupils' sense of safety when appropriately implemented.

While it should be emphasised that physical assault is a factor in only a minority of bullying incidents, and that the use of weapons is extremely rare, the Commissioner's research on bullying has established that fear of attack by peers is part of many children and young people's daily experience.



'A lot of young people use a lot of violence towards other people, it affects us all in one way or another.'¹
11 MILLION's annual event

Gun and Knife Crime - 11 MILLION's lead project for 2008 – 2009

11 MILLION is committed to children and young people's participation in all aspects of its work. Crucially, children and young people choose the organisation's lead projects.

¹ The Annual Event took place in August 2007. All other (named) quotations are taken from the 11 MILLION website.

In August 2007 a residential event was held for children and young people from projects and groups across England. The event was youth-organised and youth-led. It explained the Commissioner's duties and powers and provided opportunities for the participants to learn about a range of issues. When the 100 participants voted on which of 14 broad categories they wanted 11 MILLION to address during the next business year, they chose 'Violence, Abuse and Bullying'.

Between August and February, a series of outreach sessions and consultation events narrowed down children's particular concerns within this broad area. Gun and knife crime was children and young people's priority, with the issue of gangs also prominent. This was the case by a significant margin, and was replicated across all age, regional and socio-economic groups. Eighty children and young people from 13 different locations were involved. Some of the groups involved in narrowing the focus have asked to be involved in the main project itself.

Recent YouGov polling for 11 MILLION backs up our consultation findings. The threat of violent crime is affecting the way many children and young people perceive their safety. The stand-out top priority for the 1,100 children and young people aged five to 18 surveyed was to be "kept safe from bullying and abuse and keeping safe from crime" (59%).

4 What 11 MILLION will do over the next year

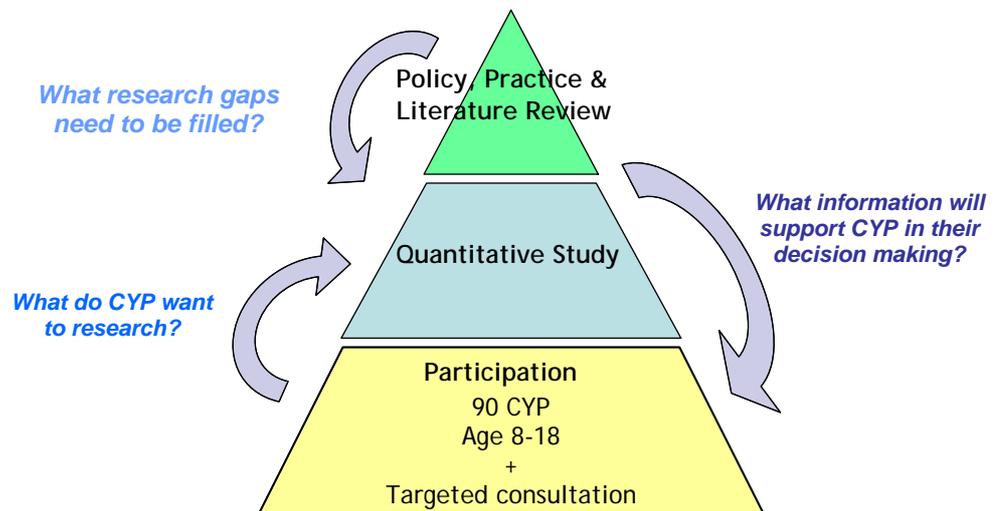


Gathering evidence and making change: a three-tiered approach

11 MILLION will use the next twelve months to ensure that children's views and opinions influence the development of policy, practice and research. We will produce new evidence, evaluate new ways of working with children and young people and, where appropriate, make recommendations using the Commissioner's statutory powers. If necessary, the Commissioner may also use his statutory powers of access and interview.

From 2009 – 2010 the project will become one of 11 MILLION's 'spotlight' areas to allow for its findings to be further disseminated and acted upon.

Our work is conceptualised as a three-tiered pyramid.



Policy, practice and literature review

11 MILLION has started to engage with stakeholders across government and the statutory and voluntary sector. The issues involved extend far beyond criminal justice and policing to include education, health, mental health, social care and play and youth provision. Our work with stakeholders will be deepened and sustained throughout the project and will enable 11 MILLION and the young people involved in the project to comment formally and informally on policy and practice as it emerges.

We will decide where, given our policy objectives, the academic evidence needs to be analysed in more detail. A systematic literature review will be commissioned. An area for possible scrutiny is the impact of peer-delivered prevention and desistance programmes.

Quantitative Study

Our initial reading of the evidence leads us to believe that we need to know more about why children and young people sometimes carry knives, in which situations they carry knives and the impact of media coverage on children's choices. We will support children and young people in our 'buddy groups'² to consider what questions a quantitative study should ask, and whether the questions should be directed at any particular ages or socio-economic groups. 'Buddy groups' will be involved in selecting the research organisation which then conducts the work.



'I don't know why young people carry guns or knives I don't know if even they themselves know.'

Lucy, 11

Participation

Participation is the bedrock of this project. It involves over 90 children and young people, 8-18 years of age, from six different projects: London (x2), Leicester, Merseyside, Birmingham and Manchester. Each project has either been involved with 11 MILLION in selecting and then refining the lead project, or has worked on the issue of street violence in the past, or both. All come from groups or communities at particular risk of violence. Young people in one of the groups have been affected by the murder of one of their peers. 11 MILLION has the capacity to support the groups to work independently in developing local projects and campaigns, as well as bringing them together to address policy and practice nationally.



'Lock people up who carry knives, guns and are violent, so they will not do it again and to deter other people.'

11 MILLION's annual event

'I think children and young people carry knives because they were abused by their parents.'

Zachary, 10

11 MILLION will also look at ways of engaging offenders in order to understand the circumstances that led to their involvement in violence.

² All 11 MILLION projects have buddy groups: these are groups of children and young people who help shape and advise the project.

The Commissioner has been developing good links with the juvenile secure estate over the last 18 months, and this should facilitate good communication with young offenders.



'They do it because they may have family problems or feel insecure. But I think the main reason they do it is because they are scared of getting hurt so they hurt others so others can't hurt them.'

Gemma, 11

Although only a small minority of children and young people carry illegal knives, the fear of knife crime affects a large number of children. 11 MILLION has already begun to gather the views of these children through its website, which is designed to be accessible to children of a range of ages and abilities. Since the launch of 11 MILLION's new, interactive website in April, many have been using it to share what they think is driving the carrying of weapons: revenge, fear, abuse and greed.

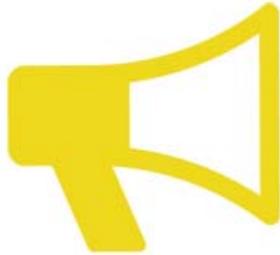


'Gun and knife crime is really getting me worried, angry, nothing is safe any more even on the news every day there is a new murder story and it is making this world the worst place in the universe.'

Mia, 11

'The stereotypical views of young people and their association with violence need to be changed.'

11 MILLION's annual event



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