



MILLION

STANDING TOGETHER:

PRINCIPLES TO REDUCE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT IN GUN AND KNIFE CRIME



11 MILLION RESOURCES

Products of 11 MILLION's Gun and Knife Crime project are available on our website. Some are listed below. You can find them all on our website by looking under Publications in the Gun and Knife Crime issue room:

www.11MILLION.org.uk > [Have Your Say](#) > [Gun and Knife Crime](#) > [Publications](#).

[Gun and knife crime film by children and young people from Merseyside, Birmingham and Manchester](#)

[Merseyside teenager talks about gun and knife crime](#)

[Standing Together: a children and young people's report on gun and knife crime](#)

[Solutions to gun and knife crime: a survey](#)

[Young people, and gun and knife crime: a review of the evidence](#)

Shapes used on the front cover of this report were created by children and young people working with 11 MILLION. Statistics are taken from a survey by 11 MILLION and YouGov, see Appendix A.

The Say No to Guns and Knives logo on the front cover of this report was created by children from East London with national children's charity 4Children.

FOREWORD

"We are all affected by gun and knife crime, and if we are not it is only a matter of time before we are. We should all stand together to stop it."

These are the words of Elara, a 12-year-old girl from London, who posted the message to 11 MILLION's website, and they are a poignant summary of what so many children and young people feel about this issue.

The perpetrators and the victims, the line between which is so often blurred, and their families and friends, are of course the most deeply affected by gun and knife crime. Following closely behind are the communities in which offences take place. But the ripples go far beyond, because even if a child or young person is not themselves in fact likely to be injured, they may fear that possibility. Our work over the year has shown that children and young people are significantly more likely to carry a weapon, most often for self-protection, if they believe gun crime and knife crime are problems in their area.

Elara's second sentence is a straightforward call to action, and is as sensible a solution as any I have heard.

Yes, it is broad, but the simple fact is that all adults have a duty to work together to reduce not only gun and knife crime, but youth violence more generally.

This means political parties working together to devise long-term solutions, and not promote quick fixes along party-political lines; it means police using their powers sensibly so that all children and young people, the vast majority of whom are law-abiding, are treated with respect; and it means the media keeping this issue in perspective, and not branding all young people as "yobs" when crime, however horrific, is perpetrated by a very small minority.

Standing Together: Principles to Reduce Children and Young People's Involvement in Gun and Knife Crime sets out 10 clear principles which come above all from listening to children and young people, and which 11 MILLION believes must be applied when solutions to gun and knife crime among young people are considered. I have been extremely glad to highlight just a few examples where these principles are already being put into practice.

The origins of this report lie in the fear of rising gun and knife crime. However, Standing Together shows that there is in fact already much valuable work being done by countless committed people to tackle the problem. This, taken with 11 MILLION's principles, should point to optimism for a brighter future. Children and young people want to live in a safer society – now we must help them achieve that.

I would like to stress that the multi-faceted research leading to these principles could not have been completed without the input and support of many people. The acknowledgements at the end of this document reveal the breadth of our indebtedness. I would particularly like to thank YouGov and the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies for working with us on our national survey and the comprehensive literature review. Most members of the 11 MILLION team have been involved in the year's work in some form; although I am grateful to all of them, special mention should be made of my deputy and chief executive, Sue Berelowitz, the project's policy lead, Paul Buddery, and the project's manager, Oliver Lane.

Above all, I am grateful to the more than 1,800 children and young people who shared their views with 11 MILLION, and to the youth workers who so tirelessly supported their contribution.



I hope that this overview will inform youth work practitioners, policy-makers, police, politicians and the public about one of the most contentious areas of concern in contemporary society. Tackling gun and knife crime should be everybody's business: parents, families, local communities, faith groups, schools, statutory agencies including the police and courts, the media, and local and national government. Listening to the views of children and young people will be the key to moving forward successfully.



Professor Sir Al Aynsley-Green
Children's Commissioner for England
11 MILLION

WHO WE ARE

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.

The Children Act 2004

The Children Act requires the Children's Commissioner for England 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 our efforts are focused on.

Our vision

Children and young people will actively be involved in shaping all decisions that affect their lives, are supported to achieve their full potential through the provision of appropriate services, and will live in homes and communities where their rights are respected and they are loved, safe and enjoy life.

Our mission

We will use our powers and independence to ensure that the views of children and young people are routinely asked for, listened to and that outcomes for children improve over time. We will do this in partnership with others, by bringing children and young people into the heart of the decision-making process to increase understanding of their best interests.

Our long-term goals

- 1 Children and young people see significant improvements in their well-being and can freely enjoy their rights under the UNCRC.
- 2 Children and young people are more highly valued by adult society.

For more information

Visit our website for everything you need to know about 11 MILLION: www.11MILLION.org.uk.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Standing Together: Principles to Reduce Children and Young People's Involvement in Gun and Knife Crime explores how gun and knife crime is affecting children and young people in England. It draws together diverse strands of evidence to arrive at 10 principles that should improve children and young people's safety, and reduce their risk of offending. Each of the principles is accompanied by a brief case study showing the principle in practice.

OUR EVIDENCE COMES FROM FOUR MAIN AREAS:

Intensive and sustained participative work

This was undertaken, over one year, with approximately 100 children and young people in London, Leicester, Merseyside, Birmingham and Manchester. They were aged eight to 17 at the start of the project, with some turning 18 during the year. Most of these young people were from communities particularly badly affected by guns and knives. We also heard the experiences of some young offenders at HM Young Offender Institution Werrington in Stoke-on-Trent.

A nationally representative survey of more than 1,700 children and young people, aged eight to 17

The survey, conducted by YouGov and part-designed by a group of young people from Merseyside, asked children and young people about their experience of feeling safe or unsafe where they live, and how they thought gun and knife problems should be tackled. See Appendix A.

An academic literature review

The Centre for Crime and Justice Studies was commissioned to analyse the available high-quality academic research, primarily published over the last 10 years, to see what the evidence says about how the problems of gun and knife crime, and youth violence more generally, arise and how they can be addressed. See Appendix B.

Stakeholder engagement

Throughout the project, we gathered views and evidence from some of the many agencies and services actively concerned about gun and knife crime, ranging from central and local government to the police and voluntary sector.

What can children and young people do to reduce gun and knife crime?

"Be friends and help people."
Marc, aged 14



OUR PRINCIPLES

PRINCIPLE 1: *Understanding the causes of offending in order to improve assessment of and response to risk factors*

- Children and young people's involvement in serious gun and knife crime is driven by a number of factors: individual factors, relationships, community factors and societal norms and systems. Research in criminal justice, psychology, sociology, social geography and health has produced strong evidence of how these affect the development of children and young people. This evidence should enable policy-makers and practitioners to use universal and targeted approaches to minimise the risk of poor outcomes.
- The number of children and young people using guns and knives is small, the circumstances in which they are being used can be locally specific, and patterns of violence appear to be changing. Ongoing, high-quality quantitative and qualitative research with children and young people is therefore essential in order to inform the design and delivery of services.

PRINCIPLE 2: *Families are supported by timely interventions that promote good parenting*

- Families are responsible for raising children and young people but sometimes families need help and support. Help can be effective throughout childhood, and is most effective when provided early - before small problems become bigger. Parenting support should include promoting involved, safe, sensitive and non-violent parenting.
- Parenting support services have been expanded considerably in recent years. It is important that they are promoted as non-stigmatising resources.

PRINCIPLE 3: *Children and young people are educated to deal with aggression, conflict and the risks of gun and knife crime*

- Schools are well-placed to support children and young people's development of the skills and attitudes they need to live in safety. However, schools need the support of other services and parents to deliver effective strategies, including for primary school age children where there are significant local risks.
- There is good evidence that skills-based anti-violence programmes benefit children and young people, but little evidence that shock tactics lead to lasting changes. Schools which encourage a sense of collaboration and involvement and a common set of goals and values tend to experience less violence.

PRINCIPLE 4: *Relations between young people and the police are constructive*

- Citizens of all ages have the right to a professional service from the police, and opportunities to comment on their operations and strategies. Where levels of mutual understanding between police and children and young people are good, it is likely that young people will be less inclined to feel that they need to carry weapons to stay safe, and more likely that they will share information with the police about dangerous behaviour within their communities.
- Most children and young people like the police, but this view declines with age and is less positive in some areas. As currently practised, stop and search can erode the confidence of many of those who experience it. Police services are aware of tensions associated with some of their operations, and innovative local and national work is underway to improve relations.

PRINCIPLE 5: Youth work services and leisure provision are accessible to all children and young people, in terms of cost, opening hours and attractiveness

- Play and leisure can help children and young people develop friendships, skills, attitudes and ambitions that reduce their risk of involvement in violence either as perpetrators or victims. A range of exciting and rewarding provision, from universal to targeted, should be designed around children's needs and views.
- Although there has been significant new investment in this area, access to play and leisure still varies across socio-economic groups. Targeted provision is sometimes aimed at young people whose experiences make them distrustful of authority, so provision by locally based voluntary and community sector groups can provide helpful credibility.

PRINCIPLE 6: Children and young people's fear of gun and knife crime is reduced

- Although fear is a natural reaction to violent events, fear is making children and young people less rather than more safe, and is harming their families and communities. Fear that others may be carrying weapons is a major reason why some children and young people choose to carry. Providing reassurance involves public services, public figures and the media treating the issue proportionately.
- Fear of gun and knife crime has taken hold in a climate of general intolerance and negative public attitudes towards adolescents. Children and young people want to counter fear and suspicion with positive and inspirational images of their achievements.

PRINCIPLE 7: Interventions are multi-agency and locally based, combining prevention and suppression

- The problem of gun and knife crime is a national one that requires attention to critical structural issues such as poverty. The problem is also intensely localised, varying substantially across the country, and even between different neighbourhoods. Top-down approaches alone are therefore unlikely to be successful. The most successful responses so far to violence carried out with weapons have involved detailed local research and integrated multi-agency responses, developed in conjunction with their communities. Characteristically, they combine deterrence and support.
- Responsible information sharing underpins good integrated working. Recent national changes to guidance for health practitioners and health service practice have been useful.

PRINCIPLE 8: Support for victims of gun and knife crime, and for relatives and friends of victims

- Children and young people who suffer the direct and indirect affects of gun and knife crime should be offered support to recover their sense of safety, dignity and control over their own lives. Although many of the children injured by guns and knives have never, and will never, hurt others, there is a significant overlap between victims and perpetrators.
- Appropriate support may break the cycle of violence. Recent changes to increase information, protection and support for victims of crime in the criminal justice system are welcome.

PRINCIPLE 9: Penalties and sentences for children involved in gun and knife offending are designed to reduce offending and reoffending

- The sentences faced by children and young people responsible for gun and knife offences must be proportionate to the gravity of the crime, the need for public protection and the welfare of the young person who has offended. These factors will differ from case to case, so flexibility in sentencing, and the availability of a range of disposals is essential. Sentencing should reflect the desirability of the child's reintegration and assuming a constructive role in society.
- There is no evidence that increasing the severity of sentencing drives down the rate of offending. Custody, the most ineffective disposal in terms of reoffending rates, should only be used as a last resort. Where custody is necessary, evidence suggests that maintaining good family links and support on release to access accommodation, training and employment is important.

PRINCIPLE 10: High-quality research and assessment underpins policy development and practice implementation

- The seriousness of gun crime and knife crime can lead to understandable urgency in devising and implementing policy and practice interventions. However, effective change is most likely to come from maintaining a long-term view, and using an evidence-based approach. Though there are important gaps in the evidence, there are crucial lessons to learn.
- Most new initiatives in England targeted at guns and knives have not been independently evaluated, and many have not been evaluated at all. Policy should build on existing evidence of effectiveness, while the impacts of innovative approaches should be carefully evaluated. Further good-quality research should allow a more finely tuned set of responses to be developed in time which address the needs of children and young people involved in all types of weapons offences.

"My shape is very dangerous because you can kill people with it. My shape is a gun. I made it because I want to alert people about guns."
Tom, aged nine



The pressing challenge for policy-makers and practitioners is to find what interventions work for whom, why, and in what circumstances, rather than look for simply "what works".

INTRODUCTION

The extensive work on gun crime and knife crime brought together in this report – concentrated into 10 key principles – has been initiated, informed and guided by children and young people at all stages.

In August 2007 an 11 MILLION event organised and led by children and young people brought together more than 100 children and young people from projects and groups across England. It asked participants to decide the Children's Commissioner's lead project for 2008-09. They chose Violence, Abuse and Bullying, from a list of 14 issues.

A series of outreach sessions with a further 80 children and young people from 13 locations in England narrowed down their particular concerns within this broad area. Gun and knife crime emerged by a significant margin across all age, regional, gender and socio-economic groups as the area in which children most wanted to see action.

The principles set out in this report are derived from four sources: participation and consultation with children and young people; quantitative exploration of children and young people's views; a rigorous academic literature review; and wide stakeholder engagement.

Sustained, qualitative engagement with children and young people formed the backbone of the project. 11 MILLION invited groups of children and young people who already had an interest in the issue to work alongside us over the course of a year to examine the problem and what should be done to tackle it. Partnerships were established with eight projects, three in London, two in Manchester, and one each in Leicester, Merseyside and Birmingham. The children were aged eight to 17 at the start of the

year, some turning 18 during the course of the project. All were from groups or communities at particular risk of violence, as it was apparent from the outset – and confirmed by the evidence gathered during this year – that although the problem of weapons affects all children and young people to some extent, its impact is felt disproportionately by those in England's most disadvantaged communities.

Some of the young people in our partner groups have set out their experiences and ideas in a film, downloadable from the 11 MILLION website (www.11MILLION.org.uk). Throughout the project, 11 MILLION's website has been a tool through which children and young people nationally have offered their views in words and pictures. A young person's version of Standing Together, published in April 2009 to highlight children and young people's voices, was developed with the groups.

Quantitative as well as qualitative exploration of children and young people's views has informed the project. Nationally representative polling was conducted with more than 1,700 children and young people aged eight to 17. Young people from the Merseyside partner group selected the polling organisation, YouGov, then worked closely with their researchers to agree the questions that they wanted answered, and the language used. A higher than average response rate was achieved. Appendix A gives details of the methodology and results.

It is crucial that policy is guided by evidence. The United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (1990), known as The Riyadh Guidelines, state that "programmes to prevent delinquency should be planned and developed on the basis of reliable, scientific research findings".¹

11 MILLION therefore commissioned the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies to assess the best and most up-to-date evidence of why some children and young people are at risk of gun and knife crime, and what interventions can reduce this risk. Appendix B gives details of the research methodology and key findings.

Throughout the project, we also gathered views and evidence from some of the many agencies and services actively concerned about gun and knife crime, ranging from central and local government to the police and voluntary sector.



Why do you think children and young people carry knives or guns?

"I think that people do it for supposed protection. My shape is showing those who get caught by the law, and those who still walk the streets with knives."
Rosie The Tree Hugger, aged 12

UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES OF OFFENDING IN ORDER TO IMPROVE ASSESSMENT OF AND RESPONSE TO RISK FACTORS

Why do some children and young people become involved in serious gun and knife crime? Successful prevention depends on understanding the interplay between individual factors, relationships, community factors and societal norms and systems.² Research into the roots of violence across all of these areas must involve asking children and young people about the lives they live and the choices they make. It is essential to hear directly from those who ultimately become involved in serious gun and knife crime.

We know from quantitative research, and particularly from longitudinal studies, that there are factors in some children and young people's lives that increase the risk that they will come into conflict with the law.³ Key risk factors for serious and violent offending change with age, but include weak social ties, peers engaging in criminal activity, aggression, being male, having a poor relationship with parents, being a member of a poor family or having experienced childhood abuse.⁴

Reducing the risk of offending therefore involves responding to children and young people's needs across different dimensions of their lives. Co-ordinated approaches between different services are valuable because risk factors associated with criminal outcomes overlap substantially with risk factors for other adverse outcomes, from low educational attainment to poor health.⁵ Risk and protection approaches are integral to Every Child Matters and are embedded in a number of practitioner assessment tools for those thought to be at risk of offending or further offending.⁶

However, risk and prediction approaches in criminal justice have limitations. One of these is labelling – projecting negative meanings onto the lives of individuals or groups in ways that reinforce negative outcomes.⁷ The United Nations Guidelines on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency caution that "labelling a

young person as 'deviant', 'delinquent' or 'pre-delinquent' often contributes to the development of a consistent pattern of undesirable behaviour by young persons."⁸ Another limitation is accuracy. Predictions based on group characteristics inevitably produce some "false negatives" and "false positives" at an individual level. Predicting violence is more difficult than predicting offending in general, with one study finding that predictive methods failed to identify 66 per cent of those young people who later committed violent offences.⁹ Quantitative longitudinal research is not particularly well suited to describing and assessing the pathways to such unusual, diverse and extreme events as the use of knives or guns.

Qualitative research with children and young people can help fill out the picture, producing a more useful account of the risks they run and how they respond to them. The point made by a Home Office research report into gun crime applies to weapons more generally: "it is imperative that those working on crime reduction in communities affected by gun crime engage with young peoples' decision making processes."¹⁰ All young people's views are important, but particularly the opinions of those who have stayed clear of gun and knife offending despite living in difficult circumstances and areas "where the local criminal economy, fuelled in particular by illegal drugs and armed robbery, is outcompeting the legitimate labour market for some individuals."¹¹ The ways in which protective factors interact for different children and young people at different ages to strengthen resilience are not well understood.¹²

"I come from somewhere which is meant to be a difficult place, but I don't carry a knife... But other people around here, who have the same background, they do carry a knife. It's just the choice I made and the choice they made."

Male, 17, from Manchester



Marilyn Welsh,
Head of
Safeguarding at
HM Young
Offender Institution
Werrington

"I have aspirations, I have high hopes. I don't give up. But some days... I've had chances where I could have picked up a gun. I think to myself there are times when I'm getting nowhere. These people who now carry guns... they start losing their hopes."

Male, 18, from Manchester

Territorialism, aggressive forms of masculinity, securing respect and the social and emotional aspects of gang membership are fuelling violence involving weapons, and only research which is sensitive to how children and young people experience these phenomena will properly explain the power they exert over their lives.

Where children and young people have committed gun and knife offences, their stories and views potentially offer practitioners and policy-makers access to up-to-date information about patterns of offending. For example, there is concern that the age at which young people are accessing weapons, particularly within gangs, is decreasing, and that the role of younger children within offending groups is changing, but knowledge is limited.¹³ Good-quality research with those who have offended can shed light on the paths to serious violence. In particular, it can clarify how they have been in contact with services, and therefore how they might have been diverted from offending. This could expose what risks have been missed, what needs have not been met and what lessons can be learned whenever a child commits a serious crime with a weapon.



"...nothing is safe anymore..."
Mia, aged 11

The Safer Streets programme at Werrington was set up in response to two deaths: the death of a young person released from Werrington; and the death of a young person in the community, where the accused was a young person who had recently been in Werrington.

Young people reaching the end of their sentences are invited to take part in one-off group sessions generally consisting of two to four detainees. All participants have been thoroughly risk assessed to ensure that they can be brought together safely. Using a semi-structured format the young people are invited to respond to a number of questions about their experience of weapons, violence, and the reasons for violence.

Sessions reveal how young people have witnessed or been subjected to extreme violence, and have lost friends or family to guns or knives. Many are fatalistic about the possibility of leaving gangs or reducing violence. Their family backgrounds often include criminally involved siblings who become role models. They have talked about the fear of conflict, the excitement of offending, the allure of big money, failure at school, the absence of father figures, and the remorse that sometimes follows violence.

If issues arise in the sessions which indicate that individuals have additional support needs, these are acted on immediately. For example, one young person was relocated outside of London on his release to promote his safety and well-being.

"I was stabbed in the neck... I have also been grazed by a bullet. My friend was murdered... I am scared. I hate being in a gang but I need to move out of the area."

Male, 17, from London

FAMILIES ARE SUPPORTED BY TIMELY INTERVENTIONS THAT PROMOTE GOOD PARENTING

The Government's Children's Plan picks up one of the key principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child¹⁴ when it states that "parents bring up children, not government, but parents need help and support to do their job."¹⁵ Support should involve access to good advice on protecting children and young people from involvement with weapons and serious violence. More broadly, it should include promoting involved, safe, sensitive and non-violent parenting throughout childhood, so that children grow up less disposed to violence and more likely to act as responsible citizens. This needs long-term support. Although some of the benefits of investment will be felt quickly, others may take a generation to work through.

"My mum told me to watch out when I'm out. She explained all the risks and dangers of knives and things, you know, if I carried one then I could get hurt myself or I could hurt someone when I might not intend to."

Male, 15, from Merseyside

11 MILLION's survey suggests that for most children and young people, parents are the most trusted source of information on keeping safe from knives and guns. Seventy-four per cent said they would listen to advice from their parents more than from peers or professionals.¹⁶ Although this preference falls with age, and is slightly less pronounced for those in single-parent households, parents are the most trusted across ages, genders and social and racial groups.

Information is being made available to parents, locally and nationally.¹⁷ It is too early to know how widely and to what effect these resources are being used. Local and national stakeholders will want to share lessons learnt as they develop longer term strategies. Evidence from the US indicates that, on its own, information to parents and children and young people that simply warns of the dangers of weapons is ineffective.¹⁸

"You can look at a family's background and you can see how that kid might turn out. But it doesn't mean that that's that. You can get in there and talk to them and get through to them... It's not too late."

Male, 18, from Manchester

Children and young people need their parents' careful attention. One US study found that poor parental supervision – failing to monitor the child's activity – is the best predictor of violent crime up to the age of 45.¹⁹ A low level of parental involvement, including a lack of emotional and practical involvement, has a negative impact on child development. It increases the risk of many adverse outcomes, including offending.²⁰ Where parents have drug, alcohol or mental health problems, children's attachment is likely to suffer, as will attention to basic needs.²¹ Warm and involved parenting throughout childhood builds resilience.²²

Lax parental discipline appears to be associated with a raised likelihood of offending, while harsh or inconsistent discipline is even more strongly associated with future offending. Physical punishment has an adverse impact which is not entirely off-set even where the child benefits from maternal warmth.²³ Childhood abuse and neglect predicts violent offending, as does exposure to domestic violence, although the relationships appear to be relatively weak and have been contested.²⁴

Having anti-social parents, being a member of a poor family, a large family or a broken home,²⁵ and experiencing discord between parents all increase children and young people's risk of serious and violent offending. Parents may explicitly or implicitly affirm problem behaviour.²⁶ Children of prisoners are at three times the risk of developing anti-social and offending behaviour compared with their peers.²⁷

"It's difficult when some members of your family have a bad name because people expect you to live up to it."

Male, 15, from Manchester

Nurse home visitation programmes, such as Nurse Family Partnerships, offer personal, structured support to vulnerable young mothers before and after their child's birth to improve their self-care and parenting skills. Programmes of this kind substantially reduce the risk of early anti-social behaviour, child maltreatment, maternal substance abuse and maternal criminal involvement – all problems associated with future violence.²⁸ Similarly, pre-school enrichment programmes that incorporate support for parents to meet their own needs have proved among the most promising in reducing offending.²⁹

Early parent training techniques are effective in preventing offending.³⁰ The Parent Early Intervention Pathfinder has found that programmes are able to incorporate advice around violence in the community.³¹

Recent years have seen a welcome expansion of parenting support services.³² However, parenting support needs to be set alongside an improvement in families' social and economic conditions, or the impacts of deprivation could cancel out any progress. Even where young people from deprived areas are well supported by their families, and have the same favourable balance of protective to risk factors as peers in affluent areas, it is the young people from deprived areas who are more likely to become involved in serious offending, and to find it more difficult to stop offending.³³



Jan Leightley,
Director of
Children's Services
at Action for
Children

Among Family Intervention Projects (FIPs) managed by Action for Children, a number support children at risk of eviction as a result of their or their parents' anti-social behaviour. These families have similar structures and experiences of violence:

- Size – large families (62 per cent have three or more children)
- Structure – two-thirds are headed by single women
- Stability – 47 per cent are affected by inter-personal or inter-generational violence
- Safety – 79 per cent of workers recorded concerns about children's vulnerability³⁴

National research shows that a third of FIPs supported households include someone who has been arrested in the six months before referral. In addition, more than a third of 16- to 18-year-olds in FIPs households are not in education, employment or training.³⁵

Action plans drawn up and agreed with families can include diverse elements, e.g. anger management, one-to-one parenting support and attending activities to improve parent-child relations, such as sports outings.

Action for Children's Leicester FIP recognises that a chaotic home environment can affect school attendance and achievement. In these cases the key worker will, in effect, broker an individual support package tailored to the needs of the child and agreed by the children, their parents and the school.

Evaluation of FIPs has shown significant improvements in children's health, well-being and educational attainment, as well as an 85 per cent reduction in complaints about anti-social behaviour.³⁶ Improved family stability can reduce the risk of children and young people coming into conflict with the law by developing parents' capacity to manage their children's behaviour, and encourage positive engagement with other services.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE EDUCATED TO DEAL WITH AGGRESSION, CONFLICT AND THE RISKS OF GUN AND KNIFE CRIME

Although most schools are peaceful, few are immune where violence affects their local communities. Sites can be made more secure and travel routes can be made safer but the greater challenge is equipping pupils to live without violence. All maintained schools must “prepare pupils... for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life”.³⁷ This is consistent with “preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace (and) tolerance”, as required by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.³⁸

Schools, or colleges in the case of many older children, can only hope to meet such high ambitions with integrated support from other services. In some cases, high-quality programmes on staying safe from guns and knives will be helpful. These are likely to be most effective when managed as part of a whole school approach to well-being that offers a range of support for pupils to develop a secure sense of self and the social skills to cope non-violently with conflict.

Forty-six per cent of respondents to 11 MILLION’s survey say they would listen to advice from teachers about gun and knife crime.³⁹ Boys, though, are less inclined to listen to teacher-delivered advice (43 per cent against 50 per cent), as are pupils in social housing and one-parent households (38 per cent and 37 per cent respectively). The proportion of pupils who favour teachers as sources of guidance on gun and knife crime falls with age, from 66 per cent at eight years old and nine years old to 31 per cent at ages 16 and 17, with a particularly sharp dip at 12 and 13, shortly after transition to secondary school.

“Education programmes about the risks of knives would be really good for kids at primary school. You would have to be careful about scaring them but you could do it in a good way that wouldn’t do that. It’s too late to go to people our age and also it could glamorise it.”

Male, 15, from Merseyside

Primary schools in areas seriously affected by weapons and violence may be well placed to provide preventative support. Delaying until children are older would mean delaying until damaging attitudes and associations may have developed. Some 57 per cent of those involved in HM Young Offender Institution Werrington’s Safer Streets programme had become involved in what they defined as gang activity at or before 12 years old.⁴⁰

The way schools discuss weapons and violence must be age appropriate, avoid sensationalism and respond to young people’s changing experiences and attitudes. A particularly important change is the growing strength of peer influence. By the age of 16 and 17, young people would prefer advice from someone who used to be involved in gun and knife crime rather than a teacher (48 per cent to 31 per cent).⁴¹ There may be risks in ex-offenders providing guidance,⁴² but interventions of this kind appear to have proved engaging with young people, and deserve further study.⁴³

The evidence around school-based anti-weapon interventions is not strong. Where good-quality evidence exists, it appears that brief interventions with shocking elements, such as graphic images of wounds, do not change long-term behaviour.⁴⁴ In contrast, evidence of the effectiveness of general violence prevention programmes is robust. It would therefore be sensible for schools to consider making these central to their approach, bringing weapons-



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National Children’s
Bureau

specific interventions around them where necessary. School-based violence reduction programmes in the US have had positive impacts on reducing violent and disruptive behaviour. Approaches have included behavioural and cognitive strategies, peer mediation, parent training and therapy for groups and individuals.⁴⁵

Schools have unique opportunities to address violence and provide information on the dangers of carrying weapons. Individual schools or clusters in dialogue with their pupils and parents are best placed to judge how they should take these opportunities. They are already encouraged to meet Healthy Schools standards.⁴⁶ Schools may adopt dedicated programmes, facilitate learning through Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL),⁴⁷ or incorporate learning within their Citizenship and Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education. If achieved, the vision set out in 21st Century Schools will help institutions to provide appropriate advice and support without the risk of being stigmatised as problem schools, and will improve the support available to them from other services within the Children’s Trust.⁴⁸

It is worth underlining that most of what schools do to protect their pupils comes through their core business of teaching, learning and pastoral support. One of the strongest risk factors for involvement in violent or serious crime is a negative attitude towards school, poor academic performance and poor classroom behaviour. Pupils need to feel good about being at school. Schools that encourage a sense of collaboration and involvement and a common set of goals and norms endorsed by young people tend to experience less violence.⁴⁹



In 2008, Young NCB worked with groups of children and young people across the country to understand and articulate their views on what they needed from their school curriculum in order to help them achieve against the government’s five Every Child Matters outcomes. The groups reframed Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education in the context of the five outcomes with a specific focus on what they called Learning for Well-Being. The resulting charter shows where children and young people think their wider learning can help them be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; and enjoy economic well-being.

The five outcomes are mutually supportive and schools should take a holistic approach; but some of the children and young people’s learning aims for staying safe and being healthy are particularly relevant to weapons and violence.

Be Healthy: We want to learn:

- some skills to help us deal with pressure, stress and anxiety
- how to recognise our emotions and know how to calm ourselves down or get help if we’re really worried about something

Stay Safe: We want to learn:

- the skills to help us build safe relationships at home, at school and out in our neighbourhoods and communities
- about taking responsibility for our own and each other’s safety in our communities, including understanding how we deal with gangs

RELATIONS BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE POLICE ARE CONSTRUCTIVE

The needs and concerns of citizens of all ages should inform policing locally and nationally. Where children and young people interact with the police they should be treated fairly and without discrimination, regardless of social background, race or clothing. Where levels of mutual understanding between police and young people are good, it is likely that young people will feel less need to carry weapons, and be more likely to share information with the police about dangerous behaviour within their communities. The quality of each and every encounter between officers and young people can improve or damage their relationship. Where training and strategy take young people's views seriously, police forces are more likely to maintain children and young people's confidence even if relatively intrusive tactics are agreed to be necessary.

The most visible change to policing in response to rising concern over gun and knife crime has been increased stop and search: more than 17 per cent higher in 2007-08 than in 2005-06, with a 27 per cent increase in searches for offensive weapons.⁵⁰ Searches in anticipation of violence under Section 60⁵¹ rose by 27 per cent in the same period. Thousands of offensive weapons, including knives, have been seized – 2,200 in Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP) areas between June and October 2008.⁵²

Police and government believe that more searching has increased the risk of detection, discouraged weapons carrying and made streets safer. But the proportion of searches discovering offensive weapons fell to its lowest level in a decade in 2006-07. In 2007-08, less than one per cent of Section 60 searches led to an arrest for offensive weapons.⁵³

As more children and young people are being searched, while fewer are being found with weapons, what do children and young people feel about this tactic? And what is the impact of its racial disproportionality? Section 60 stop and searches of black people rose by 84 per cent from 2005-06 to 2006-07.⁵⁴

11 MILLION's survey shows some support for stop and search among those aged 12 to 17 as a way of reducing gun and knife crime, with white and black and minority ethnic (BME) young people similarly inclined towards it: 20 per cent and 19 per cent respectively. Support is stronger among lower socio-economic groups in TKAP areas, and strongest among those groups in London, at 29 per cent.⁵⁵

Eleven per cent of white and 22 per cent of BME young people aged 12 to 17 have been stopped and searched, according to 11 MILLION's survey. Nine per cent of those who had been searched said they respected the police more after the experience, but it left 39 per cent feeling less respectful towards them.

"Stop and search can be a good policy but it needs to be done properly... If I'm in a group wearing trackies I'm more likely to be stopped."

Male, 17, from Manchester

This erosion of confidence is disappointing because 11 MILLION's survey shows that 73 per cent of children and young people like or quite like the police. Views become more negative with age, dipping steeply at ages 12 and 13, and are less favourable among BME children and young people. Some 48 per cent of children and young people believe that they are either very respected or quite respected by the police. A significant number say they do not know whether they like the police, or whether the police like them (11 per cent and 15 per cent respectively).



Ian McPherson,
Chief Constable
of Norfolk Police
and head of the
Association of Chief
Police Officers (ACPO)
Business Area for
Children and Young
People

"I would feel safer with a bunch of male friends than if a police car was there. Even if I was with just one guy. That's bad, isn't it?"

Female, 17, from Manchester

Police services are finding new ways of providing information to and taking advice from children and young people. All Safer Neighbourhoods Ward Panels in the Metropolitan Police area must now have input from young people and have at least one priority aimed at children and young people. Youth forums have been established in all TKAP areas. Essex, for example, has a forum in every district, supported by a well-established interactive website.⁵⁶

Police services are sensitive to the tensions inherent in stop and search and many are working with young people to minimise these. The majority of forces now involve young people in providing feedback and training on its use.⁵⁷ In Southwark, for example, the youth-led voluntary sector organisation Young Advisors conducted polling with local young people to inform future training.

Police officers within Safer Schools Partnerships have played a key role in educating children and young people about gun and knife crime. Their regular presence provides an opportunity for children and young people to develop confidence in the police, share what they know about local threats or problems, offer their ideas, and seek help where necessary.



It is testimony to the importance the police service places upon children and young people that ACPO established a new business area, in July last year, so police matters pertaining to young people could be given greater priority.

I intend to spearhead an approach which will encourage society to look for the intrinsic decency in youngsters. Too many people underestimate their value and at times actively demonise them. It is no wonder some young people harbour negative attitudes.

As a result I am developing a new strategy, embedded in neighbourhood management, aiming to ensure the police service delivers a consistent approach to children and young people, underpinned by the principles of working in partnership to support them and improving the engagement skills of officers.

Supporting young people includes the formation of youth forums, so the views of children and young people are listened to and acted upon. Improving officers' engagement skills includes ensuring every encounter police have with young people is positive for both sides. In stop and search, for instance, young people must be treated with respect, and operations carried out proportionately.

We must ensure our officers are trained to communicate with and better understand young people. I would like a situation where police officers and police community support officers have the confidence to chat to youngsters as a matter of course rather than only when a problem arises, restoring respect between young people and the service. Building confidence between the police and young people will lead to a situation where the latter can be more comfortable in sharing their problems with us, allowing us to solve problems they may have, and in turn ensure they are safer.

YOUTH WORK SERVICES AND LEISURE PROVISION ARE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, IN TERMS OF COST, OPENING HOURS AND ATTRACTIVENESS

Play and leisure are fundamental to a good childhood. They can help children and young people develop friendships, skills, attitudes and ambitions that reduce their risk of involvement in violence either as perpetrators or victims. Particularly for disadvantaged children and young people, good-quality provision can offer the positive relationships and creative opportunities that hard pressed families may struggle to provide. A range of provision should enable children and young people to be spontaneous, have fun and find things to do at times that are good for them. The type of youth work provision that makes the biggest positive difference to individuals incorporates continuity, structure and progression. Good provision can also have a role in bringing communities and generations together, enhancing community safety by building a sense of shared belonging.

11 MILLION's survey asked children and young people about their local play, youth and leisure facilities.⁵⁸ The results showed that those from lower socio-economic groups are less likely than those from higher socio-economic groups to think they have activities and facilities in their local area.

Although children and young people from deprived communities are the least likely to have – or be aware of – local leisure facilities, they are no less keen to access them than more well-provisioned children. Across all socio-economic groups, about a third of those who say there are local facilities say they use them regularly. The most notable exception is black and minority ethnic (BME) children and young people: 11 per cent of higher socio-economic groups and 11 per cent of lower socio-economic groups attend local youth clubs, but only six per cent of BME children do so; 21 per cent of higher socio-economic groups and 20 per cent of lower socio-economic groups use local sports pitches,

but only 12 per cent of BME children do so. Girls are more likely than boys to make use of leisure facilities of all kinds, with the exception of sports centres, pitches and parks.

As children move into adolescence, their involvement in activities rapidly diminishes: the proportion swimming, acting or regularly involved in "other activities" halves from ages eight and nine to ages 16 and 17. Only youth club and sports centre use remains steady.

"There's nothing to do. So kids just do what they do, and they might go wrong. There's nothing to motivate the kids so what's going to happen? Round here is like a ghost town."

Male, 18, from Manchester

Aiming High for Young People: A Ten Year Strategy for Positive Activities (2007) set out the evidence for universal and targeted youth service provision. It stressed that provision which offers structure for skills to increase, relationships to grow and goals to be met is the most powerful in changing lives. It cautioned against approaches that treat teenagers as problems, lecture them, are not delivered in a safe environment, are difficult to access and do not address young people's needs in the round.

While evidence of how leisure time activities impact on youth offending is not comprehensive – and there is a particular need for further research into sports-based interventions⁵⁹ – the promising impact of after-school recreation when linked with skills training underlines the case made in Aiming High for structure and progression.⁶⁰

Young people working with 11 MILLION argued for youth and leisure provision that meets a number of needs. In their work on gun and knife crime they demonstrated the importance



Rosemary Archer,
Director of Children's
Services at Leeds City
Council

of provision that enables young people to express themselves and shape lives within their communities. They also talked about the need for safe places where they could spend time together without attracting trouble or the attention of the police. Some were critical of the adult-centric opening times and charging policies of local services and facilities.

Substantial investment is now being made in youth and leisure services, including funding to extend weekend and evening opening. It is encouraging that young people will have a real influence on spending decisions. Connecting services to young people's aspirations is vital for both universal and targeted services. Projects, especially voluntary sector projects which develop their own staff teams from former service users, may be particularly successful in offering credible support to the most disengaged young people, those who often feel let down by and suspicious of authority.

"On the estate I grew up on the youth centre was the main facility where young people went. Then it got run down and all those people who had gone there had nowhere to go and some of them became disengaged. So (facilities) need to be there or you will lose some young people."

Female, 18, from North London



Breeze is the brand established by Leeds City Council to inform children and young people under 19 about activities they can access in their leisure time. Through the Breeze website – www.breezeleeds.org – young people access event information, competitions, vouchers and discounts. Some 58 per cent of those aged under 19 in Leeds are Breezecard holders.

Leeds Youth Council renamed the Youth Offer as The Breeze Youth Promise, which offers all children and young people:

- Somewhere to go where they will feel safe, secure, welcome and respected.
- Something to do that is right for them – whether that is fun, sporting, cultural or educational.
- Someone to talk to who will provide guidance on the things that matter to them.
- Something to say about the services that Leeds provides and the policies it follows, through plugging young people into existing forums.

A highlight in the Breeze calendar is Breeze On Tour, a programme of events in the school holidays attended by more than 50,000 young people since they started in 2004. The events are delivered in partnership with statutory and voluntary sector services ensuring that the hardest to reach young people have the support they need to access free and exciting activities and learn about services. The Youth Crime Prevention Partnership and Positive Activities for Young People's key workers provide practical support for vulnerable individuals. This approach allows targeted programmes to be nested within universal provision.

Breeze has been used to raise awareness of bullying and staying safe. In 2008, the Royal Armouries in Leeds led the No to Knives campaign, working with young offenders as ambassadors. Approximately 4,000 young people attending Breeze On Tour events pledged not to carry a knife.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S FEAR OF GUN AND KNIFE CRIME IS REDUCED

Gun and knife crime among children and young people has a number of consequences. One natural consequence is fear. Fear is making children and young people less safe and harming their families and communities. Heightened anxiety has followed a rising number of injuries and has developed within what the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child calls a "general climate of intolerance and negative public attitudes towards children, especially adolescents."⁶¹ In these circumstances, reassurance is a priority. Providing reassurance will involve using appropriate policing strategies, broadening confidence in the criminal justice system and ensuring that relevant public services, public figures and the media approach youth gun and knife crime proportionately. Children and young people need to see positive images of their peers, and need to feel valued and included in their communities.

Most children or young people who have carried a knife or gun say that they have done so for protection or out of fear. Of the four per cent of those aged 12 to 17 whom 11 MILLION's survey found have carried a knife illegally, the reason given by the great majority was "for protection", with "fear" being the next most common explanation.⁶² In some cases, a perceived need for protection is linked to risks associated with criminal or anti-social activity, particularly in groups.⁶³ But whatever the reason, where young people believe that others are carrying weapons, this can raise the level of carrying within communities.⁶⁴

For some children and young people in the most high-risk areas, fear of weapons and the perceived dangers of everyday life can foster mental states conducive to violence, with heightened sensitivity to threat and a constant preparedness for action.⁶⁵ Where this happens, young people can become isolated from the

social and cultural mainstream and become aggressively territorial, to the extent that adults disengage from them.⁶⁶ Research shows that where communities do not informally supervise children and young people's behaviour in public space – one aspect of "collective efficacy" – levels of violence are particularly high.⁶⁷

"I remember when I was young the community was a whole... but now there is no such community. I see adults scared of the young kids in my estate. There isn't a whole community."

Female, 18, from South London

For some of the children and young people 11 MILLION has worked with, media coverage has been feeding anxiety and unfairly stigmatising young people in general. The process was described to 11 MILLION by one 17-year-old female from North London as like a frightening game of Chinese whispers.

"It's like a chain reaction... More people carry them because they're frightened thinking that lots of other people are carrying them."

Male, 17, from Manchester

"I know of one boy who carries a knife. He is 11 nearly 12... He's afraid of what's going to come even though he's not part of any gangs or anything."

Female, 15, from Manchester

11 MILLION's survey asked children and young people about gun or knife crime in their local areas: 15 per cent thought that knives were a very big or quite a big problem, and seven per cent thought that guns were a very big or quite a big problem. The number of children and young people in London who say that knife crime is a problem rises to 36 per cent, and of those in Manchester who say gun crime is a problem the figure climbs to 18 per cent.



Ravi Chandiramani,
Editor of Children & Young People Now

Children & Young People Now's Positive Images campaign and awards scheme champions positive portrayals of young people and recognises good practice in combating negative media stereotypes. Balanced and measured coverage is nowhere more important than in reporting of gun and knife crime.

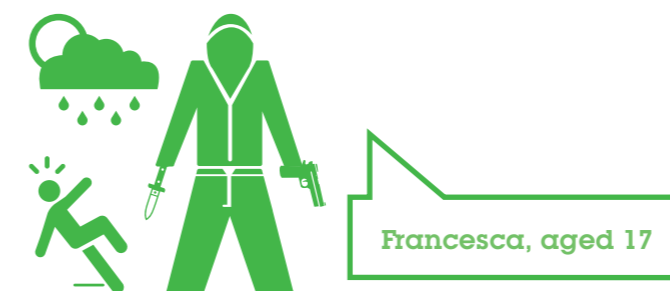
Positive Images rewards young people who have shown creativity and initiative in making a positive contribution in their communities. Young people who have tackled the issue of guns and knives are among the past winners of awards. Project: Consider, a hard-hitting DVD produced by the UK Youth Parliament, challenges young people to consider what might happen if they carry a weapon. Crucially, its tone is informative rather than preachy. Similarly, Amienata Sillah produced a powerful DVD to educate her peers and the community about the reality of knife crime, after her friend was stabbed to death outside the school gates. Resources such as these should be distributed in schools and youth clubs; they enable young people to stay safe and, being driven by young people themselves, enhance young people's collective self-esteem.

The media can play a constructive role by painting a more realistic picture of young lives to adults and young people alike, by ensuring young people are involved and spoken to in order to hear their views, rather than merely spoken about and feared automatically. Previous Positive Images winner BBC Radio Kent handed over a week's worth of airtime to teenagers to produce their own features and assist with a breakfast show and phone-in. Another winner, the Scarborough Evening News, has had a policy of featuring success stories and interviews with young people in the area.

Beneath national statistics there are substantial local and demographic variations. Some 26 per cent of children and young people from lower socio-economic groups in some urban areas see knife crime as a problem, rising to 36 per cent in London. In general, those from a black and minority ethnic background are twice as likely as their white counterparts to state that knife crime is a problem, even though there is no significant difference in terms of carrying a knife or gun across ethnicity overall.⁶⁸

11 MILLION's survey suggests that high-visibility policing has a role to play in providing reassurance. A substantial majority of children and young people say that seeing the police in their area makes them feel safer – a figure that holds true across socio-economic and racial groups.

For the children and young people who have worked with 11 MILLION, tackling gun and knife crime involves more than dispelling fear. Fear needs to be replaced with optimism, and fatalism with aspiration. Some young people say that good role models are important in giving them the confidence and values to be successful in life, and are disappointed that they see few around them. Research suggests that a lack of economically successful role models within deprived communities can depress young people's aspirations.⁶⁹ As a result, some initiatives against youth violence, including Lambeth Council's Young and Safe strategic action plan, emphasise supporting "social and private enterprise for young people" in order to "create a new generation of successful role models working in the legitimate economy."⁷⁰



INTERVENTIONS ARE MULTI-AGENCY AND LOCALLY BASED, COMBINING PREVENTION AND SUPPRESSION

Ultimately, responsibility for policy dealing with gun and knife crime and the conditions which underlie it rests with national government. It is a national problem requiring attention to critical structural issues, such as poverty reduction and effective education and training. But it is also an intensely localised problem, varying greatly across the country, and even between neighbourhoods. The UN Study of Violence Against Children has noted that "top-down prevention approaches that can influence society-wide risk and protective factors should be balanced against bottom-up approaches that highlight local needs and which allocate prevention responsibility to communities."⁷¹

Local strategic assessments and violence problem profiles by Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) can identify which risks are faced by which local children and young people.⁷² Where the local level of risk is serious, a long-term strategic response which combines preventative and reactive measures and integrates the work of all relevant agencies and services will be necessary. The views of community leaders, parents and children and young people themselves are crucial in devising, guiding and reviewing these strategies.

Some local strategies against weapons and youth violence have shown promise in the US. Although caution is needed in reading across evidence from very different environments, some lessons can be learned. The basis for the most effective action has been detailed, specialist research into local offending to identify the demographic groups and geographical hot-spots where problems of violence are most severe. In the most well-known and influential strategy yet used against youth gangs and firearms, the Boston Gun Project commissioned research from Harvard University into local gang activity. Agencies used this information to target

a small number of prolific offenders. They were offered practical support to access services for substance abuse, job skills or recreation, but warned that if they did not accept this offer, and violence continued, all legal levers would be pulled in aggressively pursuing enforcement action. Highly-integrated, multi-agency models of this kind have, where effectively managed, reduced levels of gun-related homicides and injuries significantly, at least in the short-term.⁷³

Variations of the Boston model – collectively known as "comprehensive community safety gun violence reduction" initiatives – have achieved varying levels of success. Their intensity poses operational challenges. Highly intrusive hot-spot policing may alienate the communities whose co-operation is essential to sustainable crime reduction. Where results have been promising, such as in Boston and Indianapolis, considerable effort was made to establish credible community consultation mechanisms – a lesson noted in English programmes and guidance.⁷⁴ Principle four of this report addresses youth engagement.

Another challenge is the potentially resource-intensive nature of truly comprehensive strategies. In the US, it was hoped in some cases that programmes would operate as "firebreaks", interrupting a self-perpetuating cycle of violence. But violence patterns typically appear to re-establish themselves, and there are no compelling studies demonstrating a longer-lasting effect.⁷⁵ Local partners, as well as central government, should therefore view such multi-agency arrangements as long-term commitments that need to be resourced as part of their core business.

"We are all affected by gun and knife crime, and if we are not it is only a matter of time before we are. We should all stand together to stop it."

Female, 12, from London

Information sharing is critical in any multi-agency strategy, not only to reveal trends and hot-spots, but to identify individual children and young people at risk from violence. While there is considerable good practice to build on, not all cross-sector connections are equally strong. The National Audit Office recently found that 62 per cent of CDRPs never use data from local education records of pupils excluded for violence, and 80 per cent never use data from Safer Schools Partnerships.⁷⁶

The Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP) has encouraged data sharing between health services and CDRPs, helped by revised guidance from the General Medical Council. As of January 2009, 37 hospitals in TKAP areas were routinely sharing anonymised information on violence-related wounding with the police.⁷⁷ Improving responsible information sharing between health and other agencies including criminal justice is vital, as a study of Accident and Emergency departments found that more than half of episodes of woundings do not appear on police records of violent crime.⁷⁸

The role of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) in comprehensive multi-agency strategies will differ across the country, but it should be clearly articulated within local arrangements. LSCBs have an important role in developing protocols for information sharing about children and young people at risk of harm, and the referral and decision-making processes which should support them. Recent draft government guidance has pointed out that valuable lessons could be learned by LSCBs revisiting Serious Case Reviews on children and young people harmed through gang violence. These may show whether there are lessons to be learned about how agencies work together to protect children in the future.⁷⁹



Claire Belgard,
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Young and Safe at
Lambeth Borough of
Lambeth*

Lambeth's five-year programme builds on existing practice, and develops new partnership working, rooted in the disadvantaged communities and neighbourhoods where problems are most serious. It aims to reduce youth violence by supporting existing services and policy and by adopting a new operating model that provides a targeted service for those most at risk of committing violent offences. It has five priorities.

- Priority one is good intelligence and information sharing between all partners.
- Priority two is enhancing the targeted support for young people.
- Priority three will improve pathways to employment.
- Priority four supports family life and parents of at risk young people.
- Priority five is improved enforcement through a more effective partnership approach.

The young people targeted are: those at risk of becoming first-time entrants to the criminal justice system; violent offenders with a risk of escalating to serious violence; and serious violent offenders. The programme seeks to identify all young people in these three groups and to ensure they have a lead professional, get assessed and are referred into services that will reduce the risk of them offending. Key to achieving this is the multi-agency approach, which is evidenced by a new forum where partners share information on the most at risk young people. A commissioning process is underway to increase the supplier capacity, including local and voluntary organisations, for intervening with young people.

The plan will be delivered through Lambeth First, which is the Local Strategic Partnership. A Community Advisory Panel, which includes the Youth Council and the Parents Forum, will give advice and feedback on its delivery.

SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF GUN AND KNIFE CRIME, AND FOR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS OF VICTIMS

Gun and knife crime causes harm directly to its victims, indirectly to the friends and family of victims, and insidiously to the communities in which it becomes established. It limits the capacity of children and young people to achieve all of the Every Child Matters well-being outcomes. Addressing these different kinds of harm requires measures which support those who have been victimised to recover their sense of safety, dignity and control over their own lives, and should extend from “medical, psychological and social assistance through governmental, voluntary (and) community-based” assistance, as stipulated by the United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power.⁸⁰

The rights of all victims must be treated with the same seriousness, whether or not the victim has at other times been an offender. Appropriate support may interrupt the cycle of violence which currently sees children and young people who have been subjected to violence growing up with a raised likelihood of committing violent acts, and sees some becoming involved in violent retribution.

“I lost someone very special to me, and it’s like a huge part of my life has been taken away... You have to be strong... have to move on. Otherwise it just goes on and on, and where does it stop?”

Female, 15, from Manchester

The grim physical damage caused by guns and knives is obvious. Some 620 children and young people were admitted to hospitals in England in 2006-07 as a result of assault by a sharp object – including, but not exclusively, knives – and 326 were admitted as a result of gunshot wounds.⁸¹ Some of these wounds are grievous, leading to long-term impairment. There are also

psychological wounds, even where violence was threatened or witnessed rather than carried out. As a result, children and young people may suffer problems up to and including conduct disorders and post-traumatic conditions, with consequences ranging from poor school performance to increased likelihood of drug or alcohol abuse.⁸² Where violence is a recurring experience, children and young people can come to see their world as fundamentally unsafe and their lives as lacking meaning.⁸³ In these circumstances they are more likely to make reckless decisions. Children and young people who have suffered violent attacks have an increased likelihood of being violent and carrying weapons.⁸⁴

Although many of those hurt through guns and knives have never, and will never, hurt others, there is significant overlap between victims and perpetrators.⁸⁵ A striking aspect of discussions in HM Youth Offender Institution Werrington’s Safer Streets programme is the extreme violence with which young people have lived.

- All of the boys have witnessed someone being stabbed; their opinions of these experiences varied from scary and surprising to an adrenalin rush.
- Tony then told us he had witnessed two of his friends being shot which resulted in the death of one of his friends.

Records of Safer Streets discussion groups. Name has been changed.

In the communities where problems are most concentrated, significant numbers of children and young people are growing up dealing with violence and loss through crime involving weapons. This presents a major challenge to all child support services, not just dedicated victim support services. It is therefore helpful that the



Gillian Guy,
*Chief Executive of
Victim Support*

National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services sets out the need for bereavement support through parents,⁸⁶ that the National Healthy Schools Standard for Emotional Health and Well-Being indicates the importance of training staff with a pastoral role to respond appropriately to children’s bereavement,⁸⁷ and that understanding how children react to bereavement is part of the core knowledge required of the whole children’s workforce.⁸⁸

Government has taken steps to increase information, protection and support for victims of crime in the criminal justice system. The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime gives legal rights to all victims, a Victims’ Advisory Panel provides advice and challenge to policy-makers, and a Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses⁸⁹ will promote victims’ interests and keep the code under review. The Youth Crime Action Plan committed the Government to do more to support young victims of crime. Some £500,000 of its £100 million funding has been allocated to pilot schemes over six months with the intention of establishing models of good practice.⁹⁰

In the context of gun and knife crime, where intimidation can seriously affect children and young people’s ability to access justice, enhanced support for young witnesses during the trial process has been particularly significant. This has been helped by special measures including live links and intermediaries for very young witnesses or those with communication difficulties.⁹¹ New guidance on setting up local services to support young witnesses was issued in March 2009.⁹² However, national monitoring of victims’ and witnesses’ experiences of criminal justice services does not currently include children and young people under the age of 16.⁹³

Victim Support in Norfolk offers activity breaks for children and young people affected by crime. These take place at Hilltops Outdoor Centre, Sheringham, Norfolk and provide young victims with adventurous activities in a safe and controlled environment. This helps young victims to come to terms with the effects of crime (such as anxiety, fear and anger), and to regain their confidence and self-esteem.

The breaks offer direct support to young victims, including the opportunity to talk through their feelings and emotions with trained staff and volunteers. Physical activities also allow young people to release their energy and anger in a positive way. Victim Support believes that this safe “venting” of their emotions may help deter young victims from future offending behaviour.

This activity builds on the success of a range of initiatives run by Victim Support in Norfolk for young people who have been on the receiving end of crimes, including serious incidents. One initiative was the establishment of a Youth Advisory Panel, which was consulted when developing the activity breaks.

The panel is also a forum for young people affected by crime to feed back on the services they receive from Victim Support and other agencies within the criminal justice system, and to have a voice in advising how these can be improved.

Members of the panel took their experiences of and views about crime against young people to a series of workshops with the National Youth Theatre in June 2008. As a result, they have produced short film clips on youth victimisation issues which Victim Support plans to use online to raise awareness and understanding.

PENALTIES AND SENTENCES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN GUN AND KNIFE OFFENDING ARE DESIGNED TO REDUCE OFFENDING AND REOFFENDING

Gun and knife crimes committed by children and young people include the most serious possible offences, including murder. Victims have often been other children. Sentences faced by those responsible must be proportionate to the gravity of the crime, and must take into account both the need for public protection and the welfare of the individual who has offended.⁹⁴ The treatment of offenders must reflect what the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child describes as the desirability of “promoting the child’s reintegration and the child’s assuming a constructive role in society.”⁹⁵ Sentencing should be sufficiently clear and predictable to command public confidence, including the confidence of children and young people.

However, a rigid system is unlikely to reduce the risk that children who have offended violently will go on to become violent adults. Flexibility is crucial. The criminal justice system needs a greater range of options at its disposal to use in accordance with the circumstances of every individual incident and child. In all cases these should be used to bring home the harm caused by offending, engage with its causes and support positive change.

Gun and knife crime is a catch-all term, useful in describing the potential seriousness of a range of unlawful actions, but unhelpful in the context of penalties and sentencing. Crimes specifically relating to guns and knives can involve production, sale, carrying or use. In the UK legal context, weapon-use offences can range from violence against the person, domestic violence and sexual offences to robbery, burglary and criminal damage. What are commonly referred to as knife possession offences may refer to other articles with a blade or point being carried without good reason or lawful authority in a public place.⁹⁶

Children and young people believe that possession of knives and guns should be dealt with quite differently. Sixty-eight per cent of those aged 12 to 17 favour custody for those who are found carrying a gun illegally, whereas 49 per cent believe that custody is the right response to those found carrying a knife – a less popular option than non-custodial options, including a curfew (57 per cent) or teaching about the risks and consequences (52 per cent). Children and young people who have worked with 11 MILLION showed similar attitudes, believing that custody should be kept for gun possession, not knife possession. They explained this as distinguishing between protective intent and aggressive intent.

“There’s a difference between people who carry guns or knives. People who carry guns are going out there to do crime, to kill. People who carry knives are not, I don’t think. They are scared or they are trying to protect themselves.”

Male, 18, from Manchester

There is no evidence that increasing the use of custody or the length of sentences reduces the level of gun and knife violence.⁹⁷ Although sentences have a deterrent effect, the extent to which they deter does not appear to rise or fall in relation to the severity of the sentence.⁹⁸ Comments of young people working with 11 MILLION suggest why more severe sentencing would be particularly problematic in the case of children and young people who possess or use weapons. The drivers of these behaviours can feel far more compelling than the potential loss of liberty. Custodial sentences are less likely than any other type of sentence to prevent youth reoffending.⁹⁹ Worryingly, the seriousness of offending of some young men sentenced for gun crime through Operation Trident increased after their incarceration.¹⁰⁰



James Cleverly AM,
The Mayor of London’s Ambassador for Young People

Children and young people working with 11 MILLION have proposed bringing offenders together with families who have lost loved ones to violence involving weapons - something incorporated in the Youth Justice Board’s Knife Possession Prevention Programme.

“Going to a Young Offenders’ Institution wouldn’t stop me carrying a knife because the reason why I would carry it would be the same still, to protect myself.”

Male, 15, Merseyside

Research into the effectiveness of criminal justice interventions with young offenders reveals some key themes. One is the need for interventions which bolster problem solving and interpersonal skills. For example, conflict resolution programmes have been shown to reduce recidivism of serious young offenders.¹⁰¹ Another is the importance of maintaining, as far as possible, consistency in the young person’s key relationships, which is why the Government’s commitment in the Youth Crime Action Plan to ensuring that young people in custody are kept closer to their families is valuable, and why the inclusion of intensive fostering among the options within the new Youth Rehabilitation Order is potentially important. Violence among young people in US intensive fostering programmes has been reduced by an average of 72 per cent compared with control groups.¹⁰²

“People with criminal records cannot get jobs, so offenders reoffend, and it’s very difficult to break that cycle. We should concentrate on rehabilitating and educating rather than sending them to prison.”

Male, 17, from North London



Project Daedalus is part of the Mayor of London’s Time for Action programme to reduce serious youth violence and reoffending in the capital. It seeks to ensure that young people going into custody, mainly for the first time, are given the opportunity and support to change their behaviour.

As part of a pilot programme, young people from six identified London boroughs are assessed using a triage approach as soon as they enter Feltham Young Offenders Institute. A separate wing has been set aside for those who are sufficiently motivated, where an intensive regime will provide combined support around life skills, education, therapy and preparation for employment.

Joined up resettlement support is crucial, as is consistency in the relationships around young people during the transition from custody back into the community. Consequently, Project Daedalus will establish Resettlement Brokers to work with young people both in custody and in the community, liaising with Feltham-based staff, Local Authority agencies and employers. Through an increased use of Release On Temporary Licence (ROTL), young people serving custodial sentences will be able to attend job and college interviews.

The goal is for a seamless transition back into the community, where a young person will have stable accommodation and employment or education to go into immediately on release. Relationships built up with brokers in custody will continue in the community, to ensure support is there for when things get difficult.

It is hoped that by introducing a new approach, the Daedalus model will contribute to an improvement in reoffending rates among young people leaving custody, and add flexibility to the range of options available in the custodial setting.

HIGH-QUALITY RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT UNDERPINS POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND PRACTICE IMPLEMENTATION

Public policy-making is a complex process in which evidence of likely outcomes, even when uncontested, is only one of several legitimate considerations.¹⁰³ Political decision-makers, service providers, commissioners and academic researchers may be operating to quite different timeframes. Where children and young people are facing serious risks, gaps in the evidence about the likely impact of different responses to gun and knife crime cannot justify inaction. Yet the urgency of the issue of gun and knife violence may in some ways be distracting, and research evidence therefore has a particularly important role in checking and directing policy development.

Anxiety created by gun and knife crime, as discussed in principle six, has led to calls for strong and swift intervention – including by children and young people themselves. Acts of violence have taken place on the streets and been replayed in the national media, while the experiences in children and young people’s lives which can culminate in potentially fatal confrontations have been laid down over many years, often in private, and largely unremarked. In these circumstances, the standards set down for policy development by the Government in 1999 remain salutary. These standards state that all stakeholders should work together towards “policies that are forward looking and shaped by the evidence rather than a response to short-term pressures; that tackle causes not symptoms; that are measured by results rather than activity.”¹⁰⁴

“Adults listen but don’t do anything about gun and knife crime.”

Male, 18, from Manchester

All of the principles set out by 11 MILLION in this report rest on evidence of various kinds, including rigorously assessed academic evidence. There is a considerable body of social scientific evidence with which to assess the current problems and evaluate possible interventions.

However, important limitations to this evidence have already been noted. There are very few rigorous¹⁰⁵ evaluations of strategies against children and young people’s use of weapons. There are no high-quality evaluations of anti-knife programmes, not least because most other countries appear to treat knife problems as expressions of youth violence in general, rather than a distinctive phenomenon. Most evidence of anti-weapons programmes comes from the US, where such interventions tend to be part of anti-gang activity, targeting young adults as well as young people and children. As already noted, the most promising interventions are multi-modal and multi-agency, meaning that it is inherently difficult to isolate the most critical elements of practice, or assess how they inter-relate.

Another key limitation relates to applying what evidence we have. Initiatives can be difficult to transfer from one environment to another, even where they are tackling the same problems in what appear to be very similar situations. Researchers have noted that new interventions may fail to deliver the expected benefits unless they can be grafted onto existing local practices and experience.¹⁰⁶ This essential localism is another reason why principle seven is so critical. Similarly, it can be difficult to scale up relatively small research projects into mainstream services while remaining faithful to their original methodology and quality standards.¹⁰⁷



Steven Matthews,
*Chief Executive of
the Mentoring and
Befriending
Foundation*

These and other limitations in no way undermine the case for evidence-based practice, rather they underline that it is a dynamic learning process, not an off-the-shelf option. Significant policy changes and investment decisions have been made with the aim of reducing risks to children and young people through weapons. All of these could provide valuable opportunities to assess and broaden the evidence base in support of durable solutions. However, the review of the academic literature around gun and knife crime prepared for 11 MILLION by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies notes that “the vast majority of these initiatives have not been independently evaluated, and most have not been evaluated at all.”¹⁰⁸

Most of the strongest evidence currently available relates to a reduction of violence among children and young people, not a reduction in their use of weapons. In one respect this is unproblematic – even helpful – in keeping policy focused on children’s fundamental needs and behavioural and cognitive development. In another respect, it means that policy and practice need to become more finely tuned in order to meet the needs of the small minority who use or become involved with weapons.

This report’s first principle sets out the case for further research with children and young people into pathways to violence involving the use of weapons. An aim of this research should be to disentangle some of the minority behaviours that are unhelpfully grouped together in the broad category of gun and knife crime, within which can be found bullying, self-defence, retribution, robbery, alcohol abuse, territorialism, gang behaviour and in some cases the sexual coercion of girls and young women. The pressing challenge for policy-makers and practitioners is to find what interventions work for whom, why, and in what circumstances, rather than look for simply “what works”.¹⁰⁹

There has been a clear increase in recent years in the use of peer mentoring and mentoring as a vehicle for supporting children and young people involved in or affected by violent crime and ‘gang culture’ across the country. Programmes are being set up to get to the heart of the problem. The use of mentoring has been seen as a positive step forward in re-engaging both the victims and perpetrators of youth crime with people in their communities.

Just one example is South Central Youth in Lambeth. Their Back from the Frontline project involves youth workers and peer mentors going out into the community, onto some of the area’s most disadvantaged estates, and targeting children and young people aged between 12 and 21 years and who are at risk of involvement in gangs and violence. The project supports children and young people to turn away from offending and make positive life choices.

Further research into the impact of mentoring would provide the accurate quantitative and qualitative information that would enable government, local government and service commissioners to realise its benefits and potential impact. It would also provide decision-makers with an informed understanding of how mentoring can help support the community and how it can be implemented successfully across a range of provision.

The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF), the national strategic body for mentoring and befriending, wholly supports the call for further research into the impact of mentoring in this key area. While many projects currently evidence their impact, there is still more that needs to be done. The MBF recognises the need to develop more robust impact measurement tools, both at a project level and at a national level.

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SOLUTIONS TO GUN AND KNIFE CRIME: SURVEY

11 MILLION worked with YouGov to ask more than 1,700 children and young people aged eight to 17 for their views on gun and knife crime through an online survey.

The sample was divided into two strata – the first was a national sample of 1,032 children and young people aged eight to 17 inclusive selected to be representative of age and gender; the second was a sample of 700 children and young people from lower socio-economic classes in seven urban areas whose police force was part of the Tackling Knives Action Programme (Birmingham, Essex, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester and Nottingham).

The survey examined a number of issues, including perceptions of gun and knife crime levels, reasons why weapons are carried, solutions, perceptions of safety, relationships with parents, teachers and police, and demographic differences.



How does gun and knife crime affect how you live your life?

"Knife crime has affected my life because of the area where I live, which is near a council estate. I personally think the children who use knives are not to blame, it is their parents and the way they were brought up."

Mizzy, aged 12

Perception versus reality

- One in six young people perceive knife crime to be either a big or fairly big problem in their area. However, young people in "high-risk" areas are almost twice as likely to have a perception that knife crime is an issue in their area.
- Young people from a black and minority ethnic background are twice as likely to state knife crime is a problem compared with white young people.
- In London, the perception of knife crime as a big or fairly big problem is much greater than the national average, at 36 per cent.
- Only four per cent of 12- to 17-year-olds admitted carrying a knife either now or in the past and for the majority carrying was an infrequent occurrence.
- Self-protection was the most common reason given for carrying a knife.
- One per cent saw gun crime as a big problem and a further six per cent as a fairly big problem.
- The perception of gun crime was higher among young people in high-risk areas with 16 per cent stating it was a big or fairly big problem.
- In Manchester, 18 per cent said guns were a problem in their area.
- Only four respondents stated they carried a gun or had ever carried one.

A sense of place

- While seven in 10 young people believe that their area is a good one in which to grow up, 10 per cent thought it was bad or very bad.
- Nearly a quarter of young people living in social housing think their area is a bad place in which to grow up.
- Nearly three in 10 young people in Birmingham do not consider their area safe.
- There is a strong relationship between safety and whether young people believe their area is a good one in which to grow up.
- The older the respondent the less likely they are to engage with local facilities and amenities. More than one third of 16- and 17-year-olds do not take part in local activities or clubs.

A sense of self

- Becoming a teacher or a police officer are popular aspirations across all age groups.
- Those aged 14 to 17 choose more vocational professions such as IT, health and beauty and childcare.
- Overall, 72 per cent believe they will achieve their ambitions. For 14- to 17-year-olds the figure rises to 76 per cent.

Views on the police

- Some 82 per cent say they like the police a lot or quite like them. But for 16- to 17-year-olds, 10 per cent say they really like the police.
- Nationally, 56 per cent say they see police infrequently or never. The poll also shows that the more a young person sees the police the more likely they are to say that they are respected by them.

- Sixty-one per cent of eight- and nine-year-olds feel very or quite respected by the police but the proportion of 16- and 17-year-olds saying that they feel respected halves to 30 per cent.
- More than one in eight of those aged 12 to 17 had been stopped and searched by police.
- Of those stopped and searched, 39 per cent said they respected the police less afterwards. Nine per cent said they had a better view.

Staying safe from gun and knife crime

- When asked who they would listen to most on how to stay safe from gun and knife crime, 74 per cent said they would listen to their parents, while 67 per cent said the police.
- The older the respondent, the more likely they were to consider friends or former weapons carriers to be the best source for advice about staying safe.

Solutions to gun and knife crime

- Young people favoured a mixture of solutions to tackle gun and knife crime.
- The most popular measures were focused on prevention, rehabilitation and harsher prison sentences. Some 36 per cent supported education about the risks and consequences, and 32 per cent were in favour of giving children and young people more to do.

The report was published in March 2009, and can be downloaded at: www.11MILLION.org.uk

YOUNG PEOPLE, AND GUN AND KNIFE CRIME: A REVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE

11 MILLION commissioned the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies to review what high-quality academic research – qualitative and quantitative – over the last 10 years tells us about how children and young people may become involved in gun and knife crime, and what can be done to promote their safety.

Published and unpublished sources were considered, not only in the field of criminal justice but also in areas such as psychology, sociology, social geography and health. Because gun and knife crime are expressions of wider phenomena of youth crime and violence, the review also considered more general contexts of disaffection and youth offending, though its findings in these areas cannot be considered definitive.

SOME OF THE MAIN FINDINGS ARE GIVEN BELOW:

Risks to children and young people

- Violence causes fear and stress, and being exposed to it – as a victim or by seeing someone else being victimised – makes people more pre-disposed to commit violence themselves.
- Inequality, lack of opportunity, poverty and relative deprivation are likely to generate stifled aspirations. The development of criminal careers can therefore also be understood as a way of satisfying material aspirations.

- Notions of street credibility and respect can become very significant to young people in deprived communities, who may lack legitimate access to other forms of status achievement. Yet this street social capital, while it bonds young people closer to their offending peer groups, can also serve to distance them from the wider community and societal values.

Some evidence of effective or promising interventions

- Some rigorously assessed US interventions, such as 'hot-spot' policing, appear to have had positive impacts in the short-term though they may suffer from problems in sustaining approval and acceptance among local communities.
- Multi-agency, multi-focus approaches, which are locally based and combine both prevention and suppression, have been shown to be more effective in combating gun violence among young people than single interventions by agencies working in isolation.
- Youth violence prevention approaches, such as therapeutic foster care, that seek to influence knowledge, attitudes and behaviour seem promising in their impact in reducing involvement in violent behaviour.

Gaps in evidence and ineffective interventions

- Of the few US anti-gun initiatives that have been subjected to the most rigorous analysis, none have shown significant long-term reductions in young people's gun violence.
- Zero tolerance and deterrent approaches within the criminal justice system do not appear to be effective.



Why do you think children and young people carry knives or guns?

"Using guns and knives cause young people and old people and especially children of all ages to either die or be involed in a serious injury my shape is describing how this can lead to unhappiness with guns and knife use!"

Laila, aged 13

Reflections on evidence and interventions

- Focusing on the weapons themselves may prove something of a distraction. There is an absence of clear evidence about whether interventions should be tailored specifically to the issue of guns and knives.
- Remarkably few interventions on youth knife and gun crime, nationally and internationally, have been subjected to rigorous research and/or independent assessment.
- Evidence of young women's roles as either mediators or initiators of violence, or the connection between sexual violence against females and weapons, are all areas that are only becoming known anecdotally and deserve in-depth research.

The report was published in March 2009, and can be downloaded at: www.11MILLION.org.uk

NOTES

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

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

What is 11 MILLION?

11 MILLION is the organisation led by Sir Al Aynsley-Green, the Children's Commissioner for England.

11 MILLION and the Children's Commissioner make sure that adults in charge listen to what children and young people have to say.

Talk to Us



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