

WHO'S NEXT?

TACKLING YOUTH KNIFE CRIME TOGETHER:
COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

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TIME TO TACKLE THIS TOGETHER

ANDREW PRITCHARD, FOUNDER, AP FOUNDATION



Knife crime has cast a dark shadow over London, a city that should be a haven for its youth. Instead, it has become a battleground where too many young lives are lost or destroyed. According to the Metropolitan Police, there were over 15,000 knife crime offences* in London in 2023/24, an alarming 20% increase from 2022¹.

This terrifying trend over the past few years is not an anomaly. Knife crime offences in England & Wales have nearly doubled over the past 10 years – teenagers between the ages of 13-19 years old are now twice as likely to be fatally stabbed than a decade ago².

The rate of senseless violence continues to rise, so it is time for us to join forces to tackle the problem from all angles. On May 1, 2024, 'May Day', I called upon a group of friends who were equally distressed about the worsening outlook for our youth: from DJs and actors, to ex-offenders, criminal lawyers and educators. This diverse group of people came together at the AP Foundation Hub in Hackney, London, to form a core campaign alliance.

This began a new chapter in our collective effort to end the relentless cycle of violence – a cross-sector, community-driven coalition was formed. From the frontline, many of us already deliver youth services that support the agenda of government's [coalition to tackle knife crime](#).

The AP Foundation's 'Who's Next?' campaign has brought together a local network across Hackney and Newham – people impacted both personally and professionally by it – to devise community-driven solutions centred around education, opportunity, cooperation and support – to be delivered across a 'ground zero' pilot location in a targeted London borough. From addressing the forces that drive our young people into this deadly lifestyle, to empowering communities to effectively respond, we are asking the key questions concerning us all: "who's next to be killed or given a life sentence?", but equally, "who's next to make a positive change?" – by receiving that life-changing opportunity.

The time to act is now, and through this campaign, alongside our dedicated partner network, we are committed to leading the charge against London's youth knife crime. We will continue to expand our alliance, with hopes to eventually span across all of London – growing organically, one step at a time, with neighbouring communities.

But first, we need your support to get our recommended solutions, outlined within this community action plan, to be trialled via a community-driven pilot, located near the heart of our alliance. The devastation wrought by knife violence across our communities demands collective action – to build on and unite the existing hard work being done. Its root causes and impact will not simply fade away – and neither will we – so please join us with your support.

THE JUSTICE SECTOR MUST ACT

MANISHA KNIGHTS, MD, MK LAW



I have been working in the criminal justice system for almost 24 years, and it deeply saddens me to think of how many young people I have represented over the years that have been arrested and prosecuted for knife crime – many of whom have been the victim of it themselves. The sad reality is that over the years some of those youths have now either passed away or are still serving life sentences.

The justice sector is increasingly playing catch up to the rising levels and severity of violent youth crime with sentences getting more punitive and deterrent-focused, rather than to rehabilitate and reform. I often feel that all our industry is doing is just sticking a plaster on the wound and not actually getting close to fixing the source of the problem. When I am defending someone during a murder trial, I know that there can be no real winners. Not only has the victim tragically lost their life, but everyone who knew them will be impacted for the rest of theirs. If one of our clients is convicted, there is also just pure devastation for them and their loved ones. But even if they are acquitted – whilst there is a momentary celebration for our client who has secured their freedom, we are still sitting in a courtroom full of mourners for the life that was lost.

For many of the youths who we represent for first-time offences, I feel there is a lost opportunity to help them further. At present, these offenders are often thrown back out into the world where their crimes just escalate to more serious offending. Many of these kids just

cannot see a way out and some feel that they just don't have a choice. By building my sector into the community-driven solutions, we can help to educate and support youths at risk of reoffending and even those currently serving sentences wanting to turn their lives around.

Sadly, though, for some of these young people who get caught up in the justice system it may already be too late. They're already entrenched in the lifestyle and in too deep. That is why we must act as a community, united, through early intervention that our coalition believes must centre on: education, opportunity, co-operation, and support.

I am done with just being a glorified first aider with my box of bandages and know that it is time to be a part of something that really focuses on the source of the problem. The 'Who's Next?' campaign is addressing the challenges that our young people are facing and will provide them with the tools to enable them to navigate through a productive life. They will have a better understanding of what they are doing and what the consequences are of doing it, while showing them that more legitimate opportunities are available to them if they build the knowledge, network, and skills to achieve it.

In all my years of defending people, the most rewarding moments have been where my former clients manage to walk away from their past lifestyles with a real future ahead of them – a future that is bright! Those moments just don't happen often enough, but I truly believe that this campaign will help open the door for many more of those moments.

CONTENT SUMMARY

This is the first published body of work in the campaign series (more on this in the About Campaign section). The first section focuses on the key issues, presented through a holistic overview, that our community believes will help a wider audience to better understand the complex nature of youth knife crime. United by a common goal, we later put together a series of proposed community-driven solutions that we plan to implement during a London borough-based pilot in 2025.

These insights were gained through a series of interviews conducted with London-based, frontline community stakeholders (more in Methodology), personal case studies told by people directly impacted by knife crime (see Real Views section), a cross-sector focus group workshop, and a student feedback survey.

For many years, local authorities, the Metropolitan Police, charities, and community-oriented organisations, such as youth support services, have worked tirelessly to develop and deliver early intervention and diversion activities that have a lasting impact. Many of these projects are powered by the Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), guided by the five priority areas. We aim to build on this great work by consolidating local support services and increasing the sustainability of community resources, while staying aligned with many of the invaluable insights found within the Youth Endowment Fund's Toolkit.

The Campaign Coalition's Pilot proposal comprises a series of innovative community-centred solutions – created by London's communities for the benefit of its communities – that we propose can make a significant impact to tackling youth knife crime when actioned during a localised pilot over a two-year period. Our cross-sector coalition will share best practice and acquire funding collectively under shared goals through partnerships with both the public and private sectors.

By no means is this the definitive and entire approach needed, but we have used our diverse network's combined vast experience and insight to outline additional measures to those already in place, that we strongly believe can drive meaningful change. To put insight into action via a pilot model.



PILOT PROPOSALS

- **To implement a framework** that creates local networks, uniting like-minded charities and youth support service providers, to produce coordinated projects
- **To create a supplementary educational programme** between local youth support work charities and educators, offering a much-needed range of 'real-world skills' to students
- **To introduce outcome-focused Community Awareness & Action Groups (CAAGs)** where nominated community custodians will meet with local authorities and police to discuss key dynamics and updates on shared goals set by the local community
- **To offer local community hubs and youth centres guidance and tools** for their operations to become more self-sufficient and commercially minded
- **To offer professionalised training in gang grooming and county lines exploitation** to more public services' outreach personnel, such as GPs, teachers, social workers, police, and parents

VISUALISING COMPLEX ISSUES



INFLUENCE OF GANG CULTURE

The impact of knife crime is far-reaching. Survivors suffer lifelong trauma, and families who have lost loved ones are left with unimaginable grief. The perpetrators, often vulnerable youth groomed by gang leaders, face severe or even life sentences. The wider community is left with fear and anxiety, leading to a breakdown in trust and community cohesion which further exacerbates the problem.

In London's most affected boroughs by violence³, such as Croydon, Southwark, Hackney, Newham, and Tower Hamlets, postcode gangs and weapons have entrenched themselves deeply within the streets of local communities. In these areas, knife crime isn't just an issue, it's a daily reality. In the last three years, over half of all teenage homicides in London had links to gangs⁴. These gangs, previously defined by nothing more than a few streets or a housing estate, are adapting to become more fluid with their recruitment style – drawing young people into their ranks at an alarming rate.

Gang leaders strategically target vulnerable youth – those from broken homes; kids struggling in school, perhaps even with learning difficulties; often those living in poverty, desperate to find a way out. These young people are groomed with promises of protection, money, and a sense of belonging.

Once they are in, it's incredibly hard for them to get out, and they are on a fast track to violence, crime, prison, and even death. This isn't just a fringe issue, it's a pervasive problem that is spreading across London, pulling in more and more young lives – from both poorer and more affluent neighbourhoods – into its grip.

But this is only part of the story of youth knife crime and predominantly the consequence of a wide range of contributing factors, many of which are interlinked with one another.

CHALLENGES OVERVIEW

It is no secret that London's youth knife crime is an extremely complex issue, with its root causes multi-faceted and dispersed across all areas of society.

There is a vast and exceptional range of academic literature out there, featuring in-depth theoretical analysis into the contributing factors (please see the [Further Reading](#) section), so this overview will differentiate from this approach. Instead, it aims to engage with London's communities and frontline stakeholders, those supporting youths and their families, who can help us to deliver meaningful change.

To better understand how this could look, it is essential that communities directly impacted by those changes – personally and professionally – are engaged with and heard. That is why we have reached out and listened to the views of people who see the daily devastation it causes: victims, their families, perpetrators, ex-gang members, educators, youth and social workers, police Safer Neighbourhoods Teams and integrated gang units, NHS staff, and members of the criminal justice system. This cross-sector coalition forms the core of the campaign's coalition community.

To help those of you, like us, wanting to better understand the collective range of issues impacting youth and communities, the issues we must collectively seek to address, a top-level overview has been provided below.

YOUTH KNIFE CRIME HAS MANY CONTRIBUTING FACTORS



Each issue has been grouped into and linked with one of the following frontline impact categories – personal and social, the education system, community resourcing, and police relations. The 'Who's Next?' campaign coalition will specifically target parts of these areas with the recommended solutions discussed later within this community action plan.

This does not necessarily mean this is the definitive approach for understanding and tackling youth knife crime, but it was the most feasible one for our coalition to visualise collectively – to help the team then devise a series of coordinated, community-driven solutions in response to them.

VISUALISING COMPLEX ISSUES



01

PERSONAL & SOCIAL CHALLENGES

At the very heart of London's local communities is its people. Navigating city life can be complicated and stressful for most of us, but for some, there are factors at play which can make it truly overwhelming.

London is one of the busiest and most populous cities in the world, but at the same time, it can be one of the loneliest for when someone needs help and is unsure when and where to turn.

There are a range of key personal and social issues at play summarised below, that affect youths and their families within domestic environments.



POOR MENTAL HEALTH IS EXACERBATING THE SITUATION

- Lack of self-worth
- An unsupportive family dynamic
- Fear of the home and local environment
- Exposure to violence from a young age
- Inexperience with conflict resolution and undeveloped emotional intelligence (e.g. managing stressful situations)
- Limited access to counselling services – there are people living with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) without support
- Medication abuse
- Recreational drug use

CHALLENGES IMPACTING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

- Poverty and lack of income support for families
- Fewer role models within families (especially male)
- Lack of supervision at home with parents at work
- Limited development opportunities to strive for
- Lack of guidance and direction from positive influences



SOCIAL TRIGGERS CAN MAKE CRIME APPEALING

- Manipulation and grooming by 'false idols' in gangs: using modern technology for 24-7 access
- A gang culture in local neighbourhoods; even some with respect and notoriety
- Glorification of crime across the media; especially on social media
- Computer games depicting violence as fun and punishment free – little attention is paid to the victims

02

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

One thing communities, educators and government are certainly aligned on, is a need to improve the opportunities and outcomes for young people. However, how best to achieve this across the education sector is a different matter entirely and is exacerbated by declining budgets and resources; the aftermath of lockdowns during the covid pandemic era; a lack of unity in what approach must now be taken to deliver change.

To help us better understand what key educational challenges are impacting youth, our coalition discussed them in-depth from the perspective of both teachers and students.



Teachers experiencing worsening struggles with students, particularly since the pandemic:

- Many students are unhappy with outdated teaching methods – not aligned with the ‘real world’.
- Some show a lack of respect and self-control in class.
- Teachers fear false allegations and threatening behaviour, which limits their ability to discipline students.
- Teachers express concerns about students posting photos and videos of them across social media.

Some early interventions can induce fear for students, if not age appropriate and tailored for the audience, by reinforcing the perception that violence is inevitable in certain environments.

Social isolation and bullying at school can also lead to feelings of fear and uncertainty for students, which could promote a ‘safety in numbers’ mentality that is often associated with a key reason for many youths to join a gang.

Increasingly limited funds⁵ impact educators’ abilities to be as effective as they’d like to be.

Outdated curricula are failing to teach entrepreneurial and life skills, like conflict resolution and financial literacy.

Rising pupil exclusions increase vulnerability: 4,200 permanent exclusions during autumn term 2023/24 in England - a 35% year-on-year increase⁶. 2022/23’s annual figure of 9,000 is highest on record.⁷

03

COMMUNITY RESOURCING

The number of local venues and opportunities for members of our communities, particularly youths, to come together to create, learn, play, network, and access support services has been in swift decline for many years⁸. This, in combination with fewer identifiable community leaders showcasing the community's core values and importance of cultural enrichment, has meant that London's boroughs have become more divisive and alienating than ever.

In the context of its impact on youth development – put simply – young people have far fewer opportunities to interact with people they can look up to and relate to, as well as learn important morals from, helping them to grow to be productive members of their local community. This, in combination with several other factors, is making youths more vulnerable.



LACK OF COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP:

- Fewer positive role models within the community to showcase values and morals.
- Limited networking opportunities with local positive influences for youth to aspire to be like.
- Many local success stories not known and are perceived to be unobtainable.

BUILDING ON EXISTING RESOURCES TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE:

- Not enough community-based resources to meet demand, combined with poor awareness of the value of existing resources.
- Youths find it hard to find somewhere safe to go to avoid the chaos of streets.
- Lack of links to local businesses for youth centres and community hubs.

PHYSICAL EXPOSURE TO CRIME:

- Greater exposure to violent crimes can normalise them.
- Weapons are easily accessible and far too prevalent on the streets – cheap online sales are exacerbating the issue.
- There is a lack of major deterrents, like large fines and imprisonment, to stop online retailers selling to under 18s.
- The reoffending rate of youths (10-17 years) rose for the first time in 8 years by 1% in 2023 to 32%⁹

04

LACK OF TRUST & RAPPORT WITH POLICE

Over recent years, senior personnel across law enforcement have become more receptive of the need to improve trust and build relationships within local communities. London's police departments have increasingly relied on community-oriented policing to address this need.

However, police must do more to coordinate and strengthen these efforts. Communities want officers to focus their energies on building relationships before a crisis occurs, as Safer Neighbourhoods Teams are often still quite disconnected from most of their respective communities. Below we explore several of the key reasons why:



Youth don't trust the police, particularly as they only see them in negative situations. Communities are far less likely to interact with police in positive scenarios, and it is especially the case for young people. There is also a narrative around perceived racism and sexism within the police service that continues to fuel conflict and create a divide with local communities and, therefore, their children.

LACK OF A UNIFIED APPROACH:

- Many Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) are seen as outdated and not integrated enough with the local community. Numerous frontline stakeholders who have been interviewed stated that they do not know the true role and purpose of them. There are also concerns that they remain less effective in their current set up by operating similarly to police constables (PCs), when they were initially intended to be the eyes and ears of the community.
- Integrated Gangs Units are perceived to be more aware of community dynamics and innovative with their community engagement by Safer Neighbourhoods' police officers and community leaders. However, important learnings from their approach are not regularly shared with such teams. The Metropolitan Police service is perceived to be lacking a consistent approach with its community engagement and support across London boroughs.
- There are concerns that community engagement meetings, introduced by some London Boroughs, have become 'talking shops' with little power to act. There is strong appetite for commanders of Basic Command Units (BCUs) to help ensure that outcomes from these groups can be actioned (within reason). Currently, there is little evidence available to the public that this happens. Community officers need more trust and support from senior ranks of the Metropolitan Police in this area.

A COMMUNITY IN CONVERSATION

FOCUS GROUP INSIGHT

For the first time, in late October 2024, the 'Who's Next?' campaign community was able to bring together voices from many of the frontline community and stakeholder profiles directly impacted by youth knife crime. 16 different personalities, with diverse backgrounds and experiences, sat across two roundtables to listen and learn from one another, while having numerous productive debates on how best to collectively move forward.

We were privileged to hear views from London-based victims of knife crime, criminal barristers, Safer Neighbourhoods' police personnel, educators, social and youth workers, knife injury support personnel, ex-gang members, reformed criminal entrepreneurs, and parents of former gang members – who sat together to brainstorm a series of community-driven solutions and how they could intertwine.

Together, we identified 10 key points that we believe must be taken into consideration when developing solutions to be proposed for implementation during a pilot programme:

REBUILDING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

- **Better collaboration and information exchange** – particularly among charities and youth support providers, to help source and acquire more robust funding, while also helping to better coordinate a unified programme to amplify their impact.
- **Enhancing local amenities** – food and clothing donation stations, shower facilities, community events, networking and mentorship, and cultural identity promotions must be developed within a programme to help build a sense of community and create bonds.
- **Creating more affordable havens** – safe spaces reflecting youths' needs and interests (i.e., income opportunities, music, & sports) - showcased by people they can relate to.
- **Generating stable income** – community and youth centres must start to become more self-sufficient to stop an over reliance on local authority funding that may be cut at any time.



REIMAGINING EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

- **Make it fun and engaging** – by working with professionals who young people can relate to – sharing their lived experiences via storytelling; introducing roleplaying scenarios and reward systems; developing entrepreneurial instincts; nurturing creative and cultural passions.
- **A focus on developing 'real-world skills'** – applied across the education sector tailored for the age range – where a range of skills such as entrepreneurial, financial acumen, conflict resolution, and basic rights in criminal justice can be offered. Potential skills offerings will be proposed to students via a survey to see what they would prefer (see sub-section below).

SUPPORTING FRONTLINE STAKEHOLDERS

- **More role models showcasing positive pathways** – relatable figures from the community, such as locally-raised athletes, entrepreneurs, and reformed criminals being more engaged with and better known to youths.
- **Better advice and training for parents** – providing them with more awareness on how to seek help, if needed, and to better demonstrate the value of positive family role models.
- **Stronger integration for PCSOs** – into everyday community settings with productive interactions, to foster trust and familiarity for youth at an early age. Ideally, making PCSOs' remit more focused on supporting collaborative projects and less so on officer-related duties.
- **Professionalised training for key outreach personnel** – helping GPs, district nurses, and social workers to better identify and signpost those in need with tailored training into county lines, gang exploitation, recreational drug use, and exposure to domestic violence.

STUDENT SKILLS SEEKER SURVEY

To further assist our understanding of how to help youths develop the mindset, skills and connections that they need to choose a more productive path, we asked them directly. We reached out to **over 145** students aged 12-19 years across the London Borough of Hackney for their thoughts on what could help them (see Methodology for more on this).

There were some interesting findings that would support a modernised, supplementary skills programme:

78%

agreed that they would prefer being taught by someone that they could relate to

68%

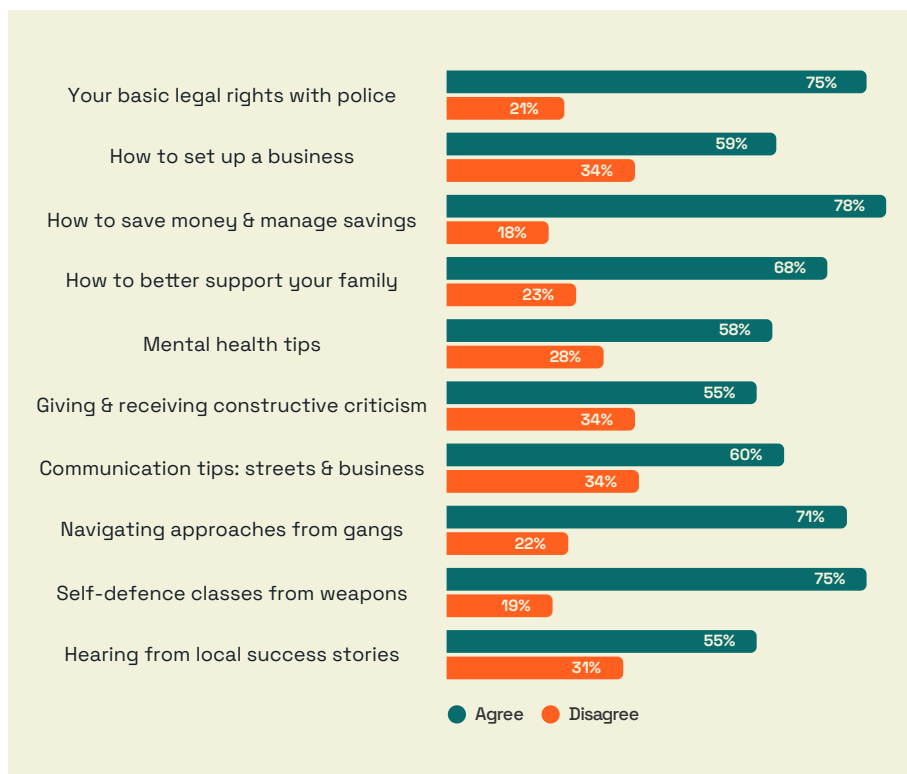
agreed that the school system needed to modernise to teach more 'real-world skills' – just 7% disagreed

80%

agreed and just 1% disagreed (with 19% neutral) when asked if the selection of real-world skills listed below would help them

STUDENTS VIEWS ON LEARNING REAL-WORLD SKILLS

What skills would help you in life that aren't taught at school?



These insights from our focus group and survey indicate that any extra-curricular programme looking to better engage with and help build real-world skills must help students to: better navigate street life and feel safer, be more financially aware and opportunity-enriched, and feel empowered to build on their passions. Training should be delivered by relatable practitioners within an interactive environment. We will use these findings, in conjunction with insights found in the [Youth Endowment Fund's](#) excellent Toolkit, to assist us with the development of our pilot programme.

COALITION'S PILOT PROPOSAL

London's communities are in a precarious position where, if a change of approach towards coordinated community-driven solutions isn't trialled, then this situation will likely deteriorate for us all. Our campaign coalition proposes to trial each of these solutions during a localised, two-year long pilot based at a 'ground zero' location in a London Borough starting in 2025: delivered through a collaborative framework; powered by a cross-industry, local network of frontline community stakeholders:

To create a supplementary educational programme between local youth support work charities and educators, offering a range of 'real-world skills' to students

– this will be supplementary to the traditional academic curriculum at schools, colleges, and pupil referral units. Training must be opportunity- and awareness-focused, helping students to navigate life with 'real-world skills', such as basic financial acumen (e.g., how to create and build savings), conflict resolution, key legal rights (with police), avoiding gang exploitation, and communication skills (for the streets and professional world).

The programmes we will deliver are tailored to the audience's age demographic, so not to inadvertently induce fear and be irrelevant to their current needs. It will be led by personnel who children can relate to from their local area, who understand community dynamics and the challenges of that environment (read [Real Views case study](#)) – teaching through fun, interactive role-playing scenarios from relatable, lived experiences.

There is a genuine need to also offer similar programmes to young inmates at youth offender institutions and prisons to help them to rehabilitate into the outside world (read [Real Views case study](#)) – offering them skills, tools, and long-term support channels that can better equip them for the challenges they will face on the outside.



To introduce outcome-focused Community Awareness & Action Groups (CAAGs) – we share the passion and desire of frontline personnel within the Metropolitan Police to build public trust: through enhanced engagement and feedback channels, in addition to developing more accountability with measurable community goals (read [Real Views case study](#)).

“THERE HAS BEEN A PROGRESSIVE BREAKDOWN OF TRUST AND COOPERATION”

Local police and community members remain on separate teams, so we aim to create collaborative, outcome-focused working groups. Currently, in some boroughs, police attendance at quarterly community meetings isn't unheard of. However, to help incentivise local communities to better interact and communicate with their local police, they must see them much more often in positive, productive contexts as human beings – sharing common goals to make their local environment a better place with collective accountability. Essentially, to put the 'goal before the role'.

During a pilot, we'd like to establish Community Awareness & Action Groups (CAAGs) – meeting monthly, comprising a handful of nominated key community representatives, Safer Neighbourhoods' police sergeants, and local council officials to share regular progress updates on pre-determined goals. These goals would be established and held accountable during quarterly 'open door' community feedback in-person sessions (with members of police Safer Neighbourhoods Teams present). The CAAG would work with local police units to establish measurable targets, based on benchmarked metrics. To create meaningful dialogue about community perceptions of police, concerns about specific local areas and changing neighbourhood dynamics, as well as offering measured advice on where the police can better integrate with productive community events – as per the [UK Government's Safer Streets](#) aims.

Further to this, we'd like to establish fresh dialogue with a pilot area's BCU (Basic Command Units) Commander to explore potential mechanisms where collective decisions from CAAGs, that introduce modest changes impacting local police operations, can be given effect.

To implement a framework that creates local networks, uniting like-minded charities and youth support service providers, to produce coordinated projects – there is a lot of incredible work being done behind the scenes to help combat youth violence and knife crime by addressing their root causes. However, by working in isolation, the potential of these essential prevention and intervention methods is restricted due to challenges with funding, resources, and coordination (read [Real Views case study](#)). Charities compete for the same, limited, funding pots, but there must be more incentives to work together, as well as guidance published on collaboration and collective goals.

Our coalition will come together to change this approach to amplify its impact – through expanded outreach, personnel, cooperation and communication. We have developed programmes and infrastructure on how to support one another across the same local communities, for the duration of a pilot programme.

To offer local community hubs and youth centres guidance and tools for their operations to become more self-sufficient

– so they aren't solely reliant on funding from local authorities and complex government tenders. Youth centres continue to close at an alarming rate as local authorities do not have the funds to support them. But evidence shows the work they facilitate offers significant value. Research by [UK Youth](#) and [Frontier Economics](#) found that for every £1 government invests in youth work, the benefit to the taxpayer is between £3.20-£6.40.

**£1 OF TAXPAYER MONEY
INVESTED IN YOUTH
WORK CREATES
£3.20-£6.40 OF VALUE**

We will create guidance, developed during a pilot programme by campaign partners who have succeeded in this area, to help increase commercial awareness. Over the first 24 months of being in operation, guidance would show how to better use features, resources, and even local youths' entrepreneurial skills and services nurtured at the hubs – with a focus on how to maximise commercial opportunities via local partnerships, sponsorship, fundraising, and advertising – using revenues to help make services more affordable for local youth.

To offer professionalised training in gang grooming and county lines exploitation to more public services' outreach personnel and parents – our partners want to expand their current training operations to help more frontline public services to better identify youth at high risk of violence, drug exploitation, and gang grooming. Currently, there is a lack of standardised training available for GPs, district nurses, social workers, and educators across these areas.

There are many cases across London where parents have been unable to seek help once they have learned their child has entered gang life, due to a lack of recognised support channels (read [Real Views case study](#)). Parents would benefit from regular opportunities, perhaps during parents' evenings and community events, to discuss one-on-one with trained professionals the dangers associated with gang affiliation, drug dealing, and carrying weapons – as well as ways to spot if their child has joined a gang and how to get support if this happens.



REAL VIEWS:

A CHANGE OF APPROACH IS REQUIRED BY POLICE



I have been a police officer within the Metropolitan Police for over 10 years and am proud to have witnessed us modernise our approach towards tackling youth crime and violence, particularly in recent years. However, we still have a long way to go and must work more effectively with our communities to deal with the worsening severity of knife crime incidents occurring across London.

Currently, I work as a police sergeant managing police Safer Neighbourhoods Teams in the Hackney borough. It is a tough job to be a police officer, but most of us still do it because we love making a positive difference in the community by helping people in need. As much as some people like to think otherwise – we are human with our own insecurities and emotions.

I will never forget attending my first knife-related fatality about 10 years back. The victim was a teenage boy at just 17-years old who was part of a gang in Hoxton. He died at the scene from 13 machete wounds across his body, with a Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) team attending and unable to save him – a truly horrific end to his short time in this world.

The next day my partner and I visited other gang members associated with him who were very young teenagers and even pre-teens. We spoke with their mums too, as none had a father present in the household, but none of the boys or mothers were very receptive to us, as you can imagine in such circumstances, but this is a sad reality of the divide that exists. 10 years later, I have pretty much seen each of those young boys go through the prison system regularly.

I wish no one would ever have to witness the death of another person in such a tragic manner, but sadly, it is part of our job, and we must accept and climatise to it, so we are functional to handle the aftermath: inquiries, community engagement, reports and attempts to prevent retaliation. It can be challenging at the scene of violent crimes switching from our natural state as empathetic human beings to 'officer mode', who is expected to manage the situation, filled with pain, panic, and uncertainty, while remaining calm. We don't always get it right, we certainly aren't perfect, and I feel communication during and community follow-up after such situations is an area we can improve on.

TIME FOR MEANINGFUL CHANGE

As I said before, over the past 10 years, I have witnessed a positive change in attitude of officers more generally: to be more accepting of diversity, to favour education and prevention rather than just punitive measures, and even mental health has become more of a priority – police attitudes generally mirror that of society (as we are also part of it!). We are also able to show our human side more internally, which, in turn, has helped us to do this with the public: to be more compassionate and understanding of the challenges many young people and their families must face. I often notice that once initial barriers come down, we can build a human connection with them, but it is our job to produce an environment for that to happen more frequently and consistently.

While some police teams have become better at engaging and communicating with the public, especially integrated gang units, we have not made enough strides doing this with one another and making our approach to public engagement consistent across the police.

A key issue is that various teams, even Safer Neighbourhoods teams from my own experience, rarely talk to one another about best practice and exchange insights on key developments. We also lack a unified approach between teams from an operational perspective, as middle management (like sergeants) don't regularly speak to one another. This siloed approach, in all honesty, will likely limit us in reaching our maximum effectiveness. However, I must note, a key reason for this is not down to lack of caring, most of us genuinely care an awful lot – it is mainly down to lack of time and competing priorities. Crime is relentless and so, collectively, we need to gain further insights and perspective on what those should be.

My team and I hold quarterly community feedback sessions with various community leaders and residents, known as Ward Panels, to help us identify what our priorities should be and community dynamics that must be considered. But we still need to better understand community perceptions of us and how we can help to improve them. I think there can be fresh mechanisms introduced for constructive criticism to flow both ways between the community and local police in these environments, centred on building collaborative projects and goals.





It feels like there is often a lost opportunity to have a vessel between officers like me, officers in line management, and community leaders. I think this is where important changes can happen to the Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) role – stripping it back to its original blueprint – solely community focused and immersed within it.

I have observed that many PCSOs operating across Hackney, and even London more generally, do not have a clear remit – that distinguishes them from officers in the eyes of the public. Most are tasked with supporting primarily on many officer duties, like plain clothes patrolling and search warrants, when this shouldn't be the case.

PCSOs are generally trained and line managed by police sergeants, people who are officers first and foremost there to prevent and solve crime. It is necessary to have them as part of our neighbourhood teams, and therefore, being managed by sergeants. However, they could do with additional training in best practice as a PCSO: what are their unique daily duties and what the expectations are of them – consistent across all Safer Neighbourhoods Teams.

Perhaps we lack community support leads within the police service, who can assist with training PCSOs on best practice and help them to operate more decisively as a liaison point for the community – able to act on moderate recommendations given during community feedback sessions, while introducing standardised metrics and benchmarks to track progress. This liaison point would enable further opportunities to share insights from experienced PCSOs: how to better integrate at community events and youth centres, schools/college visits, and even during police and community feedback sessions. So, they become more valued members of the community who are there to make us all work together more collaboratively.

London's police have made great strides over my many years in the police service, but for myself, and other officers I speak with about this, we believe more can be done for us to better integrate, proactively, with the community by building more robust communication channels and greater consistency on how we collaborate on community projects – helping us contribute more effectively to crime prevention and community enrichment. That is why I am keen to support with this campaign's community-driven solutions, to realise this ambition.

REAL VIEWS: MY SON'S DESCENT INTO GANG LIFE AND PRISON

As a mother, nothing can prepare you for when something bad happens to your child. You always want the best for someone who you love unconditionally, and you can spend a lifetime trying your best to make that happen. But life isn't straightforward, though, and despite our best intentions, things can spiral out of control.

In the early 2010s, my son Jason was arrested under the suspicion of murder related to a serious knife crime incident in the area we lived in. I was understandably extremely shocked but wasn't in panic mode just yet, as I knew deep down that he would never kill anyone. But sadly, I wasn't so sure this was the case with some of the new 'associates' he had been making in recent years. When my sons were still children, their dad went to prison for seven years, for dealing drugs, and things went downhill. He was not able to help to guide and discipline our sons as much as he should have been if he was around. I'm sure there are also many things I could have done better too. Despite this, my son was on a relatively decent path as a young teenager, playing for a professional football academy in London.

“YOU NEVER EXPECT YOUR CHILD TO JOIN A GANG, ESPECIALLY AT 17.”

Unfortunately, a couple of serious issues derailed him and sparked his descent into gang life. An older boy at his school started bullying him, which instilled a new level of fear in him and a mindset that there was more safety with numbers behind you. His football also started to go downhill too,

and he didn't have a male role model to speak to at the time about its impact on him.

You never expect your child to join a gang, especially at 17, so there'll be parents like me who don't realise the extent of their involvement until it is too late. At first, there were a few noticeable signs that Jason may have joined a gang: new faces started hanging around the house and knocking for him, he became disinterested in his previous passions and left his job, and he was also seen by the manager of his footballing project in a YouTube rap video promoting gang life.

You want to intervene, and I did try to many times, even contacting the police about the rap video – but it's a delicate balance how far to go to not push them away further. I really struggled to know where to turn. I probably could have done things differently, but this isn't something you are told how to deal with, especially as a single parent at the time. Advice isn't easy to come by, particularly as the police's priority is to deter and deal with crime – so, I would inevitably be condemning my son by talking to them more than I already had been.

THE GANGSTER MENTALITY

It is only now through mine and Jason's chats while he is in prison that I know what he had been getting up to. What started with fear and social isolation at school, was further fuelled by drugs, alcohol and gang members who he looked up to. Jason has also since expressed that gang life becomes like an addictive drug in itself: respect, notoriety, no more fear, pushing boundaries, and loads of people surrounding you who you think have your back. The more crime and bad things you do to people, the worse the 'gangster mentality' gets and you value yourself less.

Once Jason had immersed himself in gang life, things just continued to escalate and get worse. I remember sitting in my kitchen and said to my friend, "I'm going to lose my house". It wasn't long after that there was a stabbing of a teenage boy that Jason knew well, who was in the same gang. This just spiralled into a series of awful acts with rival gangs out for revenge. It culminated in another young boy being brutally stabbed to death – a murder my son and others would be arrested for.

After 16 months on bail, Jason was charged with the murder alongside multiple associates. He was remanded in custody until the trial, which lasted six weeks. When the jury went out, I thought it will all be over soon. That wasn't the case. The Jury came back with a guilty verdict. I will never forget that day, it was like someone had ripped my heart out.

When the judge was sentencing my son, he said, remarkably, that there was no evidence he had carried a knife and was even at the scene – with no traces of his DNA or eyewitnesses. However, he was said to be close by and heavily linked to the others, so, for that, was sentenced to life for a secondary role, serving a minimum sentence of 18 years.

I desperately feel for the family and friends of the deceased, nobody should ever have to bury a child taken far too early in such a way. It is truly horrific what goes on in gang life.

Jason has worked hard to turn his life around in prison over the years. He is the first to admit he should have never been there in the first place and got himself wrapped up in that world. It is a mistake he owns and atones for it daily. Fortunately, he has trained to become a personal trainer in prison and is working towards a degree – he wants to stop others from following in his footsteps to use his lived experiences to deter others from getting into that lifestyle and help find ways to get them out once in.

Most importantly, he can express to youths the reality of soul-destroying lies you are sold. These people are nowhere to be seen when you are sent away. Gang life causes nothing but pain and destruction – you either end up destroying yourself and your family, get sent to prison, or even get murdered if you stay around long enough.

If there is one thing Jason and I want people to take away from this piece, it is this – equip yourself with the skills, knowledge and confidence to never need to join a gang – you will not find one person who is better off for it in the long run.



REAL VIEWS:

FROM GANG LIFE TO SUPPORTING COLLEGE STUDENTS



I've come a long way since my days as a teenager: wrapped up in Hackney's gang culture with some of my boyhood mates. I was one of the lucky ones, though, who didn't get in too deep and got out while I still could. I now use my life experiences, both from the streets and my previous youth support roles, to help students at the London-based college I now work at through my daily interactions with them and the development programmes I build for them.

THE LURE OF GANG LIFE

For many young boys, like me and my mates when we were younger, gang life is just a route to getting the things you want at that age – money, respect, things to do, and women. I first joined a gang due to what I call 'follow fashion' – something that still dictates many of the choices, both good and bad, young people make. Like many of the kids I speak with at my college, you just want to fit in and not be left alone. So, the things our mates do have a massive influence.

As young boys, most of us are fixated on the short-term gains in life, especially in poorer areas where there aren't many ways to relieve tension: it's pretty much just women and/or fighting. For us back then, a lack of opportunities and how they were presented to us played a big part in our

poor decisions. So, too, did losing the decent male mentors that we had at my secondary school – the PE teachers who understood us. Once we left, their positive influence did too.

20 years ago, gang violence was not on the scale that it is now. Stabbings have become more brutal and deadly than ever. If we had an issue back then, by default it would be a fist fight. Sometimes, I saw others escalate it with small pocketknives drawn, typically using it in places that weren't deadly. The weapons and intent nowadays are on a whole different level – huge zombie knives, machetes, and swords are being carried by so many more kids. Carrying a weapon is now seen to be 'cool', a fashion statement. Many kids are desensitised to their existence, size, and frequency of use. Some students I speak with would rather look cool and feel protected than face the alternatives of no protection – even if that means doing a few years in prison for having it (most know they'd serve closer to 12-18 months in reality).

Since my mates and I joined that life at the age of 15, many of them got involved with serious drug dealing and stabbings. While I got out of that life in my late teens, thanks to my girlfriend at the time, most of them didn't. Up until I was aged around 27, I had seen one or two friends die each year – I've lost well over a dozen friends over this time. Crazy when I put it bluntly like that.

LIFE EXPERIENCES CAN HELP MY STUDENTS

During my final months in the gang, I still wanted an education, but the priority was survival, so I was repeatedly kicked out of colleges across Hackney. For me, a key issue at colleges – which still exists within most to this day – is that students feel that teachers don't understand. Mine came from a whole different area, so they didn't understand gang culture and the constant threat and allure that street life presents. Their priority centred on numbers passing the course, so it was obvious some of them didn't care about us as individuals. Youths pick up on this!

After my difficult college days, I moved across various youth-focused support roles in Hackney. I trained to become a probation officer at first but left after just two years, as there was very little effective rehabilitation taking place – youths weren't taught anything new that would help them in life, and they just responded badly to the lack of staff care and engagement. Working at a PRU, just after this, I soon realised most kids there were just like me when I was their age – getting kicked from place to place. However, the youth workers at the PRU were more effective than staff at my last job. Not only did they clearly care more, but they also understood gang culture and county lines exploitation. Youth were treated as individuals with unique needs.

It made me realise that I really wanted to work in colleges with troubled kids, who were just like I was – giving something back to my old community. I could take all these lessons I had learned, and mistakes I had seen myself and others make, to better support them.

Honestly, I fear for a lot of the students who come into our college. Many of them do not know how to be streetwise and have a lack of perspective on what they can offer their community. They aren't taught how to deal with conflict, how to think about the impact of their actions and the long-term consequences on themselves and others. Generally, they know very little about key life

skills, that the education sector often overlooks offering, like the basics of banking, how to earn a legitimate income, and the value of saving. They aren't given awareness of so many career paths and even how to develop basic life skills that many of our previous generations had: in-person communication, contributing to the community, and even spotting danger.

Part of the problem with carrying dangerous weapons is that youths are putting themselves in a position where, in a split second, they can make a mistake of a lifetime. They don't know what impact it will have on the rest of their lives and on the community.

The education sector needs to drastically increase the life skills offered to youth, along with more consistency to where and when they are delivered. Some colleges like mine do have great people coming in to support from time to time, but programmes need to reach so many more youths across a given local community – offering more relevant skills and opportunities, with coordinated guidance on how to progress passions and talents onto the next steps.

We need to instil two things: their perceived self-worth and a sense of being part of a productive community – that warm feeling you get when helping someone and seeing their gratitude – getting recognition and rewards for acts where parents can be proud. For many students, parents only meet with teachers when something bad happens. A sad reality.

I am excited to see the 'Who's Next?' Campaign coalition soon start to deliver these types of skills and opportunities to students, working simultaneously with schools and colleges within a targeted London area, under a coordinated community-driven programme. I hope my college's students will soon be able to benefit from it too, because a fresh approach is genuinely needed across our streets and communities.

REAL VIEWS: MY BROTHER'S MEMORY INSPIRES AND DRIVES US

BY NATHAN LEVY



My grandmother always says, “there is a time to talk, a time to be still, a time to laugh, a time to cry, a time to weep and a time for joy”. One of many things my grandmother told my brothers and I that will stay with us all forever. There will be time in our lives to experience each of these things – this is one of those times to talk and reflect.

Her old Jamaican fables, moral stories, and old sayings all meant something and, as the years passed, they all manifested themselves for us to understand. They were her life’s lessons passed down to us. The way in which she lives her life with love, courage, inspiration, goodness of spirit, and side-splitting humour, encouraged us all to live with goodness and love in our hearts.

“HIS SENSELESS DEATH SHOWS THAT ANYONE CAN BE A VICTIM OF KNIFE CRIME”

Robert, my younger brother, was the pinnacle of living to love. People loved what he said, loved the way he made them feel, loved his style, and even, for many of his friends who knocked on our door, loved him for just being himself. He was a shining light in so many eyes; you felt his presence when he entered a room. He carried himself with a classy, straight approach that many respected. I grew side-by-side with Robert and our other brother, Christopher, being in awe of their achievements – watching them make a positive impact in the world.

It pains me each day to know he is no longer enjoying the world. To know he is not out there proving his worth, setting standards for other young people to follow. His senseless death shows that anyone can be a victim of knife crime. Another case of wrong place, wrong time.

THE DEVASTATION IS FAR-REACHING

Twenty years ago, in September 2004, Robert was stabbed and murdered near our house in Hackney Grove – after he rushed to the aid of a local boy, one who he did not even know prior to this incident, who was being threatened with a knife. Robert asked the teenage perpetrator – who was aged 15 at the time of the attack – to put away his knife and pled with him that, whatever the issue was, wasn’t worth hurting someone or taking their life.

Robert was a top student at GCSE level and had just started working towards achieving excellent A-level results too – but this never happened – he sustained fatal injuries and died before he reached the hospital. Nearly 4000 people attended his funeral in Hackney, showing a level of care and solidarity that only someone like Robert could inspire.

His killer received a life sentence for murder with a minimum term of twelve years. He was still just a kid who had clearly been led down a horrible path to make him do something like this.

These devastating events ignited my unwavering commitment to addressing the root causes of knife crime and actively promoting anti-violence initiatives, particularly among the youth. I have an unrelenting dedication to prevent further loss of life and to also provide support to victims of knife crime and their families. My family and I have spent the past 20 years since that day trying to make a positive impact on my community.

HIS LEGACY LIVES ON THROUGH US

Working through all the pain and agony of losing my dear brother, Robert, I wanted anyone associated with me to know who he was and the values he embraced – to remember his name. I wanted the name Robert Levy to signify something more than just a statistic or someone who you remembered once a year with tears in your eyes.

In the aftermath of Robert's passing, alongside my family, we established the Robert Levy Foundation. This foundation serves as a beacon of hope, offering young people alternative pathways to channel their energies constructively, thereby steering them away from the allure of criminality. We have led efforts, in collaboration with other organisations, to provide mentoring services, recreational activities, and training programmes to empower local youth.

Over the years, I have had numerous opportunities to deliver presentations and programmes in schools, to engage with young people's passions, fears, and ambitions, while being able to talk about my brother, Robert – who he was and what his dreams were. I am desperate to create a safer and more promising future for young people in the UK – to break the relentless cycle of violence that has devastated my own family, like so many others.

My own charity, Inspired Futures, harnesses and implements all the qualities Robert was raised with, instilling them into other young people who we engage with.

I love the positive impact we are having. However, more can be done, as we are fighting an uphill battle. I gaze upon the streets of London, and I just see rising uncertainty, fear, more broken communities, and unrealised potential. Charities and youth providers like mine must work more collaboratively as a unified force: to motivate one another, to share best practice and learnings, to access larger funding initiatives – through a shared vision. But, most importantly, to inspire future generations that anyone can come together to create meaningful change, if they truly want to deliver positive outcomes for society. A society we all must live in.

So, through the Who's Next? Campaign, we will grow and supercharge our partner network, channelling our efforts collectively at a targeted London borough. It is through this approach that we can deliver all the great things that each one of our organisations already thrives at – that make our youth feel inspired and cared for – but under a coordinated, unified programme. One that puts creativity, culture, education, opportunity and positive role models front and centre of young people's lives.

Together, we will deliver change across London, one postcode at a time. Growing organically through neighbouring towns, ensuring our impact isn't limited to helping only parts of the local community. Together, we will ensure incredible people taken too early, like Robert, and their legacies, inspire future generations to be the best version of themselves they can be.



REAL VIEWS: WHAT US PRISON INMATES SEEK FOR CHANGE

I am an inmate serving a 25-year prison sentence at HM Prison Fosse Way. I stabbed a person to death in Hackney, London, around 20 years ago – something I will always be ashamed of.

Over the past 20 years, I have seen first-hand the rise of gang culture across England's prisons, and it is only getting worse. While I can't change what I did and bring back the life I took, I hope my bad experiences can help the youngsters who come into the prison to choose a more productive lifestyle.

If I could speak to myself back then before I committed the acts that got me here, I would say this: violence is senseless. It doesn't get you to where you want to be in the long term. Issues of money, disrespect, and gang rivalries are minor in the long run, but the violent outcomes, you never forget. If you are thinking about making money through serious violence, you will likely end up making nothing over the next 25 years, like me, when you eventually get caught.

After spending most of my adult life across the prison system, I have managed to work towards changing myself, but it took a long time. At first, I fell into gang culture and high security sectioning followed. I was continuing in the wrong direction for several years. But eventually, one inmate, Kenny, saw value in me and helped me try to achieve something in my life. Nothing else there was telling me to change but he started to guide me. I educated myself, got a degree, and grew to respect others. The officers were surprised – I even surprised myself.

The thing is, I'm proud of this, but I could have done these things on the street and not ended up here, with a person's life on my hands, in addition to all the other pain and crime I created.

I am privileged to be seen now as an elder personality at the prison that youngsters can come to looking for advice – for an open and honest chat. I have made more mistakes than I can count, but I hope to serve some purpose, like preventing others doing things that they can't take back – not only causing devastation to their own families, but the victims' loved ones too.

“THE PRISON OFFICERS WERE SURPRISED – I EVEN SURPRISED MYSELF.”

Recently, I had one-to-one chats with young inmates serving sentences for violent crimes in prison. Chatting about what got them into the gang life, and what it would take to get them out and try to turn their lives around. I share one of their truths below.

I spoke with Coded, who is serving an eight-year sentence for GBH - wounding with intent. He was 16 when he was incarcerated several years back. He is a South East London boy and is part of a notorious gang there. I wanted to know what got him into the gang life: “When I was in care, money was tight, and I had been there since I was eight. I wanted to get my Ps (money) up and get a sense of belonging.” He thought that the gang could offer him money and a family that he didn't have. “Seeing the elders with their jewels, the girls, the respect: I looked up to them.” That's all he knew.

Dealing drugs for the gang, among other acts, got him the money he craved and people backing him, that he never had. He started this when he was 12 years old going into secondary school.

I asked Coded what opportunities could have helped to stop him going down this road. "At that point, that age, none". He knew that he couldn't get the things he wanted as a teenager by legitimate means – through school and the care system environment he was growing up in. "Maybe, if I was 15, I could have done something else to help, like an apprenticeship".

But a key issue is how long you've lived the life and acts you have done. "If you aren't in too deep, it might be different. But if you have spent a couple of years in, and committed violent acts, it can often be too late" – due to the damage done and repercussions for it.

PRODUCTS OF OUR ENVIRONMENT

Could he have had more direction as a kid? Of course: "A youth club or even a stable home, a family. But there was no stability in my life". And gang life appealed more: "A part of me desired everything: the good and the bad. It's all part of the game which was all I knew".

He knows things could have been different, but "we are products of our environment. There are older people around us carrying this, carrying that". Unfortunately, London isn't a place where things are settled without consequences. "We aren't growing in an area, where, if we have a dispute, we are throwing fists. People carry."

He now has a young child, and I know how much she means to him. So, I wondered, what would it take to get him to try a legit approach to life on the outside. "An education and qualifications". Training in a profession that he is passionate about that can also lead to a well-paid job. "For the sake of my daughter, that could always be a goal to change."

"I've been five years off the roads, out of commission...but even moving away when I get out, if you have done things to people, it could always come back." Basically, just because you have decided to stop, it doesn't mean they have. "I think that's the main reason people stay. Protection."

We are all products of our environment: "75% of kids in the care system live with mental health issues. And 45% have a diagnosable mental health disorder that can lead to things like self-harm¹⁰." These people need extra help and support. "Mental health is a real thing."

"Grooming is also a real thing." They see vulnerable kids, and, because of their age and mental health issues, they can't make proper judgements: "Not everyone signs up to road life, but because of where they are from, they get sucked in". Essentially, they must all play a position.

Nowadays, he loves his rapping and music, but "I didn't find the music until I was in prison". Young people need passions and opportunities, but he wasn't offered any. He speaks about a business plan idea to open a care home, with mentoring for kids as young as 12 who, like him at that age, could get into gang life. "Of course I want to help them. But for me to preach to a younger generation about living productively, I can't live in the opposite way."

But if he had the right skills, guidance, support, and even funding, maybe: "More than half (52%) of kids in care have a criminal conviction (by age 24). The statistics show the system is failing the younger generation."

"Eventually, I must do something productive with my life. I can't be old running around dealing drugs and trying to hurt people."

Well, if I can help movements like the Who's Next? Campaign to have an impact in this prison, I'm hoping this reality comes sooner rather than later. So more reformed elders, like me, can help youngsters, like him, to make positive changes to their lives.

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- TRO - experiential marketing agency

Please note the Real Views case studies have been anonymised or changed to protect identities due to the sensitive nature of their story.

METHODOLOGY



THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

20 interviews were conducted in-person or via video call between October to January 2025 with community members and professionals directly impacted by knife crime: victims, families of victims, perpetrators, current and ex-gang members, educators in schools and colleges, youth and social workers, police Safer Neighbourhoods team members, NHS staff such as district nurses, and members of the criminal justice system (such as ex-judges at London-based Crown Courts, barristers at youth courts, and solicitor advocates).

CAMPAIGN FOCUS GROUP SESSION

On October 29, 2024, the 'Who's Next?' campaign community came together at a venue in Shoreditch high street, Hackney, to bring together voices from the local community and frontline stakeholders directly impacted by youth knife crime. 16 different personalities sat across two independent roundtables to discuss what they believe were the key challenges driving youth knife crime from their experiences and what community-driven solutions would help to reduce it.

Attending professional and community profiles included: police constables, police community support officers, an ex-judge of London's Criminal Courts, a criminal barrister (specialising in youth crime), a criminal justice solicitor advocate, youth workers, a social worker, training personnel in county lines exploitation, ex-gang members, school safeguarding professionals, parents of teenagers previously in gangs, and a chair of a local youth centre.

THE STUDENT SKILLS SEEKER SURVEY

Our anonymised survey was shared with 145 students aged 12-19 years across London-based secondary schools, Special Educational Needs schools (SEN), and colleges between December 2024 and February 2025. Students across Clapton Girls' Academy, ELATT Sixth Form, Stormont House Special School, and New City College Hackney and BSix campuses took part.

A set of five questions were put forward to students via an online link to the survey - shared with them by teaching staff - asking them what types of things could further assist their learning and what practical skills they'd like to learn. In addition, 10 different types of skills training, which were believed could be of use based on the coalition's lived experiences, were put forward to get feedback on what should be considered for building into an educational programme.

DEFINITIONS, SOURCES & FURTHER READING

DEFINITIONS

Knife Crime is defined in British law as crime involving a knife or sharp object, such as carrying the weapon with intent to harm, or using it to threaten or hurt others Allen, G. & Audikas, L. (2018/19). Knife Crime in England and Wales Briefing Paper. House of Commons Library

SOURCES FOR STATS

1. [Statista – London Knife Crime 2015- 2024](#) – statista.com
2. [ONS 2024 knife crime stats](#) - benkinsella.org.uk
3. [Compare crime in your area](#) – Police.uk
4. [A Problem Profile of Violence, Gangs and Young People](#) – London.gov.uk
5. [The state of education: what awaits the next government?](#) – ifs.org.uk
6. [Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England](#) - Explore Education Statistics, Gov.uk
7. [Record year for school exclusions](#) – BBC News
8. [London Sees Annual Drop in Community Spaces](#) – Foundation for Future London
9. [Reoffending rates](#) – House of Lords Library on Parliament UK
10. [Looked-after children](#) – Mentally Healthy Schools

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

- London's Violence Reduction Unit – [Evidence Hub](#)
- Youth Endowment Fund's [Toolkit](#)
- Fighting Knife Crime London – [Resource Centre](#)
- Street Doctor's research - [how young people are affected by violence](#) in the UK
- A range of [youth knife crime stats & updates on local pilots](#) – Youth Endowment Fund
- The Centre for Social Justice – [projects and publications](#)
- [Tackling Youth Violence, Giving Young People a Voice](#) - The Peer Action Collective
- [Hulley, Susie and Young, Tara \(2021\) Silence, joint enterprise and the legal trap](#). Criminology & Criminal Justice
- [Knife crime offender characteristics & interventions – a systematic review](#) – Aggression & Violent Behaviour
- ['If there is nowhere to go, communities go nowhere'](#) – youngfoundation.org
- [The Need for Relationship-Based Policing](#) – National Policing Institute
- [The impact of exercise on children's mental health conditions](#) – Sport England
- [Supporting Looked-after children](#) - Mentally Healthy Schools
- [How children in care interact with the criminal justice system](#) – Children's Commissioner
- [Young people's perspectives on knife crime](#) – Nacro
- [The Economic Value of Youth Work](#) – UK Youth
- Guardian - [Knife crime blighting lives of children in England, warns OFSTED](#)
- Evening Standard - Bruce Houlder KC on [education & compassion to tackle knife crime](#)

ABOUT WHO'S NEXT?

The AP Foundation's 'Who's Next?' campaign has brought together frontline stakeholders – people impacted both personally and professionally by it – to devise community-driven solutions centred around education, opportunity, cooperation and support. From addressing the forces that drive our young people into this deadly lifestyle, to empowering communities to effectively respond, we are asking the key questions concerning us all: “who's next to be stabbed or killed?”, but equally, “who's next to make a positive change?” – by receiving that life-changing opportunity.

This is the first published body of work in the campaign series. The dual-purpose of the 'Tackling Youth Knife Crime Together: Community Action Plan' is as follows:

- to raise awareness to and provide a clear overview of the key issues impacting worsening youth knife crime across London – revealed by people directly impacted it.
- to generate public and professional peer support for our proposed community-driven approach, along with its key proposals, to be implemented during a pilot programme.

There are four main phases planned to help us to collectively deliver meaningful change:

- Phase 1 – **Awareness & Support** – a public document to outline the current challenges driving London's youth knife crime, told through real stories by those directly impacted, which also highlights proposals we hope can be implemented during a pilot.
- Phase 2 – **Pilot delivery at Ground Zero** – Use the campaign coalition's suggestions outlined within this guide to form the foundations of a coordinated pilot programme delivered by our coalition infrastructure.
- Phase 3 – **Review & reflect** – create a public-facing analysis report using the key findings from the pilot which will educate and inform others on its: overall impact, successes, challenges, and perceived future threats.
- Phase 4 – **Community Expansion** – cultivate further partnerships that enable the expansion of the pilot blueprint into surrounding London boroughs.

www.whosnext2.com

ABOUT AP FOUNDATION

AP Foundation works to transform the lives of youths, ex-offenders and returning citizens. It partners with its network of local carer organisations to provide funding and support, deliver innovative and evidence-based programmes, and to raise awareness and influence government policy. AP Foundation's vision is that ex-offenders are heard and valued, with access to support, advice and resources to enable them to live fulfilled lives.

ABOUT MK LAW

Our team believe that it is every individual's right to the best service. We know that being caught in the justice system can be a traumatic experience. That's why our mission is about treating our clients with the care, consideration and utmost respect whilst receiving robust expert legal advice. For all of us at MK Law it is never 'just another case' because we know it is an individual's life, liberty, reputation, livelihood or family life that we are protecting.

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