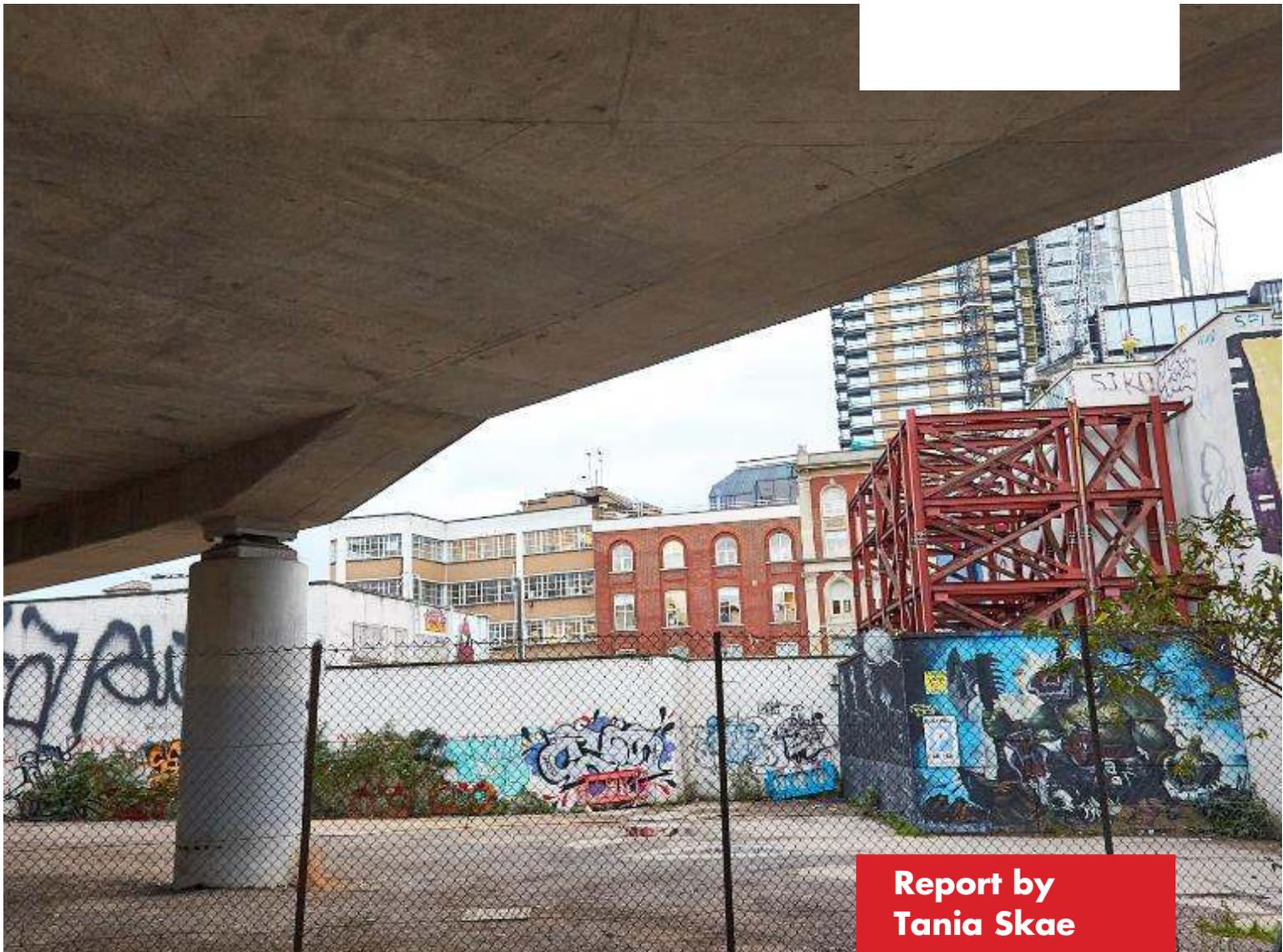


The violence virus

A community response to reducing youth violence in London



**Report by
Tania Skae**

Executive summary

Youth Violence in London is on the rise. From 2016 to 2017, the rate of young people who were stabbed to death in the capital almost doubled. 59 per cent of gun crime offenders are now under the age of 25 and three of every four acid attacks are committed by people aged under 29.

Many see this violence as a virus that should be treated as such, with calls for a multi-agency approach that:

1. Examines the causes
2. Prescribes appropriate treatment
3. Invests in a long-term cure.

We carried out a series of interviews with community-based organisations, front line service delivery practitioners, youth workers, ex-offenders and politicians. The aim; to understand their role, to learn from their experience and to explore the opportunities to work together to counter the rising trend.

We found that community-based organisations play a powerful and unique role in providing solutions to tackle youth violence in London. They provide support throughout the epidemic, at three key stages:

- 1. Prevention:** they recognise triggers and react before and at first signs, providing early intervention support
- 2. Crisis intervention:** they are experts in providing immediate, emergency support and conflict mediation
- 3. After care:** they specialise in providing rehabilitation and long-term support.

About this report

Community-based organisations are locally informed grassroots groups who have the experience, expertise, trust and compassion to work in front line delivery and day-to-day response. These organisations are London based, directly tackling violent youth crime from within communities. They are locally informed and working from the ground up.

The information provided here is the result of a series of interviews with the following organisations:

Chaos Theory

Chaos Theory is a grassroots charity working in Waltham Forest to reduce serious violence. They believe violence is a virus that, if left untreated, spreads to infect whole communities. Chaos Theory works in partnership with families, the community, the third sector and statutory organisations. They deliver the Violence Interruption Project, Prison/resettlement support and Outreach & Family Support.

Code 7

Code 7 is a registered charity that aims to provide youth focused community development services for young people from Lambeth, especially those who are either excluded from school, NEET, engaged with the Criminal Justice System, gangs or are victims of crime. The group deliver music and multimedia opportunities for young people and build in other services including mediation, personal development, life skills, job search and enterprise opportunities.

Dwaynemics

This community interest company (CIC) in Brixton aims to deliver powerful boxing and fitness workshops alongside bespoke training for employment, social development and entrepreneurship skills. These specialist areas are the key aspects of the company, they are dedicated to helping improve the lives of others mentally, socially and physically.

High Trees Community Development Trust

High Trees is a registered charity operating in Tulse Hill as an established community anchor and hub. They work with local people and external partners to build the capacity of individuals and smaller voluntary community organisations. Through the projects and services delivered and partnerships, they seek to regenerate the communities socially and economically.

Indigo Youth

Indigo Youth delivers projects for young people in Lambeth and neighbouring London boroughs. Projects focus on four key areas: Media Production, Heritage, Enterprise and Sports. They specialise in engaging with young people who are gang active or involved in the criminal justice system. Via outreach, Indigo Youth successfully identify young people facing challenges and gives them the support and resources they need to fulfil their potential.

Juvenis

Juvenis is a registered charity established in 2016 offering bespoke support and training enabling young people who are having difficulties at school, at home or in the community to turn around their lives and (re)engage with employment, education or training. Juvenis' main focus is on supporting young people from vulnerable communities and especially those at risk of offending or criminal behaviours.

London Youth

London Youth is a network of diverse community youth organisations serving young people of all backgrounds right across the capital. London youth support and challenge young people to be the best they can be through hundreds of diverse community youth organisations covering a range of youth action and youth leadership, sports development, employability, the environment, tackling youth crime, youth work training, the London Youth Quality Mark and two outdoor residential centres.

Project 507

Project 507 operates largely in London and the South East helping to reduce the level of violence within the criminal justice system by implementing effective interventions that support human development. They help to create safer & inclusive communities by preventing, managing and transforming conflict. Project 507 changes policies, practices and perceptions that generate conflict through action-research and reflective practice with people affected by violence.

Spark2Life

Spark2Life is an initiative of the Greenleaf Charity Trust and is an acronym for Sharing Positive and Relevant Keys to Life. Spark2Life is based in Waltham Forest and delivers contracts in Waltham Forest, Newham, Barking & Dagenham and Havering mentoring disaffected young people in the community and prison. Their aim is to help eradicate crime and gang culture and give an opportunity to those transitioning out of a lifestyle of crime by encouraging a positive social and behavioural life style.

Streetdoctors

Streetdoctors is a charity registered in the UK that changes the lives of high-risk young people by giving them the skills they need to deliver life-saving first aid. As well as saving lives, they use first aid as a tool to educate and empower these young people, giving them confidence and a sense of responsibility for their actions, helping to change their attitude towards violence.

#NewhamRising (The Breaking Talent Programme)

Academy Achievers and Ape Media have joined forces to deliver a partnership anti-knife crime early intervention programme in Newham. Academy Achievers deliver training and structured youth provision including educational, social, emotional and cultural awareness support. Ape Media is a registered charity that delivers training, events and production opportunities in the creative industry; TV & film production, radio broadcast & production, music construction & production; and fashion and performing arts (dance).

The Early Intervention Foundation

The Early Intervention Foundation is an independent charity and What Works Centre which champions and supports the use of effective early intervention for children with signals of risk. Early intervention is about taking action as soon as possible to tackle problems for children and families before they become more difficult to reverse.

The Youth Violence Commission

Following a debate in Parliament, a Cross Party Commission was launched in 2017 to examine the root causes of youth violence in England, Scotland and Wales. The Commission is consulting young people and working with academics and practitioners to better understand how serious youth violence manifests itself. The Commission has the support of MPs from across political parties but it is not funded by Government, nor is it an All Party Parliamentary Group. It will produce a written report with policy recommendations to address serious, youth violence issues.

Introduction

Youth violence in London is rising. In 2017, 46 people aged 25 or under were stabbed to death in the capital, almost double the previous year. ⁱ In the year to October 2017, 59 per cent of gun crime offenders were aged 25 or younger. ⁱⁱ There has been a six-fold increase in acid attacks in London since 2012 with more than 75 per cent of suspected attackers aged between 10 and 29. ⁱⁱⁱ

There are almost weekly media reports of stabbings, teenagers in gangs, young people on mopeds with knives, guns or acid, carrying out robberies, attacks and murders across the capital. 50 per cent of London's young people apparently know somebody who carries a knife. ^{iv}

Compare this to Glasgow where since 2013, the rate of violent crime has reduced by over 30 per cent following a successful public health intervention model, and to New York, where murder rates have been reducing significantly since 1999 as a result of targeted interventions such as community policing.

What we are seeing in London is often a focus on the end result and on the criminality: the weapon, the act and the perpetrators. But more questions need to be asked about why this violence is happening. Why is it getting worse? What lessons can be learned?

The role that government, police, schools, local authorities, the Greater London Authority and prison services play in tackling youth violence is regularly discussed. This report aims to add to the debate by examining the role that community-based organisations play in the fight against rising youth violence.

About youth violence

Youth violence is complex. It takes many forms, including emotional violence, neglect, sexual abuse and physical abuse. Discussion on youth violence tends to cover physical acts of violence among young people under the age of 25. It usually includes knife crime, group or 'gang' related attacks, gun crime, acid attacks and sexual abuse.

Violence obviously involves both victims and agents, but the line between victim and agent is often blurred. For instance, a child physically forced to traffic drugs, or a young man threatened to carry out an attack is both the victim and the agent.

The types and levels of violence that are seen and accepted everyday by hundreds of thousands of young Londoners has an impact on what they consider to be normal. Coverage of youth violence in the media has raised public awareness of crimes such as moped robberies, acid attacks and county lines (trafficking vulnerable young people out of London to sell drugs in rural locations). This is nothing new in London, but what is changing is the level and frequency of attacks; for example, the rate of acid attacks has risen sharply from 166 in 2014 to 454 in 2016. ^v

The widespread sharing of youth violence over social media platforms is an important factor in the discussion. Flaunting swords and machetes, drugs and money online to demonstrate power and influence is commonplace and largely unregulated. Violence and provocation, which was once confined to small audiences, is now spread virally within short spaces of time over multiple platforms.^{vi}

More and more people are becoming desensitized to youth violence because of heightened levels of exposure, both online and in real life. Punitive approaches alone (prison, longer sentences and more police) will not limit the number of young people willing to carry a weapon and will not reduce the rising death tolls because, for many young people, prison is not a deterrent. Concentrating the response primarily on the crimes and the weapon is to ignore the bigger picture and to overlook the reasons why people carry them.

“The length of sentence will not deter them from carrying weapons because they would rather go to prison than be killed.” [Temi Mwale, The 4Front Project](#)

The youth violence virus

The Scotland Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) has been treating violence as a disease since 2005. Part of Police Scotland, the VRU partnered with organisations across health, education and social work to understand the causes of violence and to develop solutions for long-term change. As they put it, they “diagnose the problem, analyse the causes, examine what works and for whom and develop solutions.”^{vii}

This approach has played a significant role in reducing crime and violence in Glasgow, including a 38 per cent fall in total incidents of violent crime and a 43 per cent reduction in the number of serious assaults.^{viii} Whilst recognizing that there are many differences between the contexts in Glasgow and in London, such as trust in the police or differences in cultural and ethnic context, there are also lessons that can be learned from an approach that considers the wider social framework and includes the perspective of those involved, what is often called a ‘public health approach’.

Many community-based organisations in London have been using this approach for a long time. They have been advocating for a multi-agency response to youth violence that addresses the causes, administers appropriate treatment, and develops a long-term cure.

1. What causes youth violence?

According to the Department of Health, violence is contagious. This means that and exposure to violence, especially as a child, makes individuals more likely to be involved in violence in later life.^{ix}

Young people who commit acts of violence experience multiple and complex influences. These could be internal influences, such as their values, attitude, beliefs and social skills, or external influences, such as their peers, school, community and society.

“They could be violent due to being previously stabbed or seeing domestic violence as a child. But also then you have poverty, you have oppression.” [Whitney Iles, Project 507](#)

The internal reasons for committing violent acts are often linked to personal suffering and distress. The external causes can be linked to wider societal issues around deprivation and inequality.

The organisations we spoke to all talked about the importance of looking at a range of factors, but highlighted trauma, social context, lack of job opportunities and youth services as particularly significant.

Trauma

If a child regularly witnesses acts of violence or neglect, such as vicious arguments, assault, drugs or alcohol abuse, this will influence the child and could induce high levels of trauma. As the World Health Organisation states, witnessing violence in the home can mean those children come to regard violence as being an acceptable way of resolving issues. ^x

“What are the underlying issues that bring people to commit violent crime? That is what the focus needs to look at. These are young people that have gone through trauma and seen things they shouldn’t have seen.” [Abdul Karim, Spoken Wordsmith and Youth & Community Activist](#)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic events that take place in a child’s life, such as domestic violence, abuse and neglect. These types of trauma as well as other ACEs like divorce, parental incarceration and substance abuse, are widely recognised to have negative, lasting impact on the health and wellbeing of children.

The implications of trauma can be difficult for young people to manage and control alone. They may display rage, increased risk-taking behaviour and engage in violent or abusive relationships. They will likely demonstrate hyper-vigilance- a constant state of alert where they see potential dangers everywhere and are looking to protect themselves. They may carry a weapon.

“If you have a young person who is paranoid and hyper-vigilant due to the trauma they have experienced, and on top of that is living in a community where many other young people are paranoid and hyper-vigilant, any small action can throw things off balance and cause chaos.”
[Whitney Iles, Project 507](#)

Community-based organisations such as Project 507 understand this context and are experienced at providing the right support. They deliver ‘compassionate interventions’, working with young people in prison and in the community who have been affected by violence, helping them to break the cycle. They recognise that trauma requires an entirely different, more time-intensive intervention for the individual and the family than other more commonly diagnosed conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.^{xi}

Social context

Peers and social networks (gangs) are often at the centre of the dialogue on youth violence. Those that we spoke to expressed views on whether gangs even exist and what it means to label someone as a gang member. But they all agreed that the discourse adopted by those on the ‘outside’ about gangs is often misinformed, misleading and detrimental to solving the real issues.

“Kids were not born into gangs. If you’re from an estate, its people you’ve grown up with. It is people becoming tribal because of where they happen to live.” [Dr Mahamed Hashi, Advocacy Manager, Young Lambeth Co-operative](#)

Organisations such as Chaos Theory genuinely know their community, understand the environment and recognise the challenges and relationships. They employ ‘violence interrupters’ (based on a model pioneered in Chicago^{xii}) who have been through the same experiences and understand the people they are targeting, those who are most distrusting of the system and authorities. The violence interrupters are ‘respected’ individuals, formerly involved in crime or violence who know the community. They have the credibility to intervene and prevent violence from escalating.

They recognise that community-based violence is not youth-led but adult-led, and that violence is a culture fuelled by money and drugs. Their response is what they call 'old school' community work, working from within communities to tackle the problems.

Community-based organisations also understand that fear, protection and safety are driving factors in young people's decision to carry a weapon.

"Many young people have become desensitized to knife crime and unfortunately for many, the act of stabbing someone has become normalized behaviour. It's important that we don't just look at the issue of knife crime through the lens of practitioners or policy makers and make assumptions about young people's motivations for carrying/using knives. We need to invest more time into listening to perpetrators self-identified reasons for carrying/using knives and ensure their voices are considered when developing solutions." [Ezzima Chigbo, Leap Confronting Conflict](#)

Poor education & lack of jobs

There are huge pressures on society to deal with the knock-on effects of rising poverty in London. For example, a rise in child poverty is coupled with a rise in child mental illness, and as a result of higher rates of mental ill health, there has been a significant increase in permanent exclusion as schools struggle to cope with more children having complex needs.^{xiii}

Sadly, what this means is that the most vulnerable children are the ones who are most likely to be excluded from school. It has been said that children as young as five are getting excluded^{xiv} and generally it is children from the poorest families who are four times more likely to be excluded, with eight out of ten excluded children having a special educational need or disability.^{xv}

The long-term impact on excluded children's life chances is also stark, with just one per cent of excluded children (educated in Pupil Referral Units) gaining the benchmark five GCSEs at C grade or above.^{xvi} The repercussions of this are detrimental to young people themselves but also to society, as David Lammy, Labour MP for Tottenham says, "The rise of exclusions is creating a pipeline of young people into our prison system."^{xvii}

According to the Mayor's knife crime strategy, those who commit knife crime with injury are predominantly described as male and frequently from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background. The unemployment rate for young black men in the UK is more than double the rate for young white men.^{xviii} Shockingly, the unemployment rate for black graduates is more than double the unemployment rate for white graduates.^{xix}

"When young people have that opportunity to not be on the block, they want to take it. But the real opportunities are not there. Young People go to a workshop or skills training and one or two years down the line, there is still no concrete outcome - no job. You need to get real opportunities for people." [Indigo Youth Ltd](#)

Young people need to see real opportunity to get well paid work. Community-based organisations like Ape Media complement their support for young people by linking up with business and industry to

provide an attractive, real-life alternative for young people looking for money and success. 30 per cent of Ape Media's 8,500 beneficiaries are now working in the creative industries.

"If you want to make a tangible change in a young person's life, it doesn't come from a workshop." [Grace English, High Trees](#)

Lack of youth services

When you ask community-based organisations what the most pressing issues are that cause youth violence, the response ranges from a lack of good quality housing and failure of the education system, to a lack of community, issues of identity, heritage and a lack of quality youth services.

"What young people see is youth centres closing down, benefits being cut and in many cases, because of this, their families struggling. To them it seems like the Government cares more about those who have money. When young people constantly see adults who don't care about them, who don't look out for them, they start to rebel." [Trevor Blackman, Founder and CEO of Ape Media](#)

From 2011 to date, there has been a 44 per cent youth service budget cut, with the average council taking £1.5 million out of youth services over this time and 800 full-time youth service posts across 22 London councils have gone. At least £1.2 million is being cut from 15 councils in 2018/19 budgets.^{xx}

The importance of providing a safe space for young people has unfortunately been hugely overlooked by statutory services. With no mention of investment in youth services in the Government's most recent budget^{xxi} and 36 youth centres shutting down across the capital since 2012, the provision and support for young people has reduced dramatically.

"It is vital to have spaces within our communities that are open to all young people, where they can play, learn and develop. Young people's struggles for emotional wellbeing and mental health are at record levels, especially in London. The opportunity for fun provided by local community youth centres is proven to support their happiness, confidence and resilience." [Rosemary Watt-Wyness, Chief Executive, London Youth](#)

As Sian Berry, Green Party MP points out in her 2017 paper 'London's Lost Youth Services'^{xxii}, good quality youth services also help prevent young people from falling into crime.

These huge cuts in youth services and mental health services mean that community-based organisations are stepping in. These locally based groups use a range of programmes and methods to engage young people who can then easily access the associated support services they need.

"It is about having a safe space, so when they do go through issues, there is also a youth service with wrap-around support that is there for them to fall back on as they get older." [Grace English, High Trees](#)

2. What is the treatment for youth violence?

"What would have taken me on a different path from violence and crime? If I'd had the love that I needed. If I'd had the care that I needed. If I'd had the attention I needed." [Young man attending 999 Club homeless support centre Deptford](#)

The London Community Foundation's work over the last 20 years, investing nearly £70 million in London's community-based organisations, has shown that they provide essential care and 'treatment' for thousands of society's most vulnerable and marginalized. This is because community-based organisations are trusted, they are connected and they are knowledgeable.

Through our partnership with MOPAC delivering their Victims of Crime fund and the Knife Crime Seed Fund, MOPAC have already invested over £2m in a grassroots community response to crime and violence in London. We have distributed over 100 grants to community-based organisations who are directly responding to the crime and violence they see in their own communities.

There are thousands of organisations whose purpose is to discover what will attract young people who need support, by using different tools or incentives to draw them in; whether through music, sport, enterprise or dance. This is an asset-based approach, where community-based organisations are dedicated to recognising and nurturing interests and talents.

One example is Code 7, a music production charity that attracts young people through music, but their intervention is also designed to integrate personal support for every beneficiary through activities such as mentoring, coaching, and work skills training. Most people come for the music engagement, but before and after every studio session, young people sit down with a trained employee who listens, tries to understand their world and work together to set and achieve goals. They give the example of a young offender who attended the Code7 music sessions but was withdrawn and removed. His talent was instantly apparent and the organisation supported him to move away from the negativity, vengeance and hate that featured in his lyrics and after six months, he enrolled at college to develop his sound engineering skills and has since not re-offended.

"They're all stars. They will shine in whatever field they go into. Whether that is being an entrepreneur or a drug dealer." [Indigo Youth Ltd](#)

Organisations specialise in providing solutions at different points in the fight against youth violence. Some focus on early action to prevent violence, some on crisis point intervention to provide emergency relief, whilst others provide rehabilitation and ongoing support.

Early action to prevent violence

As research from the Early Intervention Foundation highlights, there are trends, traits and opportunities to identify and intervene early to prevent violence. We know that early intervention programmes provide effective approaches to build skills and resilience, before heavy challenges present.

"Signs that children and young people may be at risk of gang involvement or violent lifestyles can be identified in children as young as seven. Increasing social and emotional skills in school, supporting families at risk and offering therapeutic support for children and young people is most effective in reducing involvement in gangs and youth violence." [Stephanie Waddell, Early Intervention Foundation](#)

We know that intervening early in a young person's life is positive. The community development trust, High Trees, focus on early action across all ages through mentoring, coaching and study hubs projects. Their professional development coaching helps young people aged 14 years and above who are

experiencing challenges in their lives. The Trust provides extra support to help them gain solution-based skills so young people are empowered to make genuine life changes.

“If you can get them at seven or eight you give them skills for capacity in later life. 11 or 12 is already a trigger point as they are going to secondary school and peers are already formed by that point.” [Grace English, High Trees](#)

Organisations such as Dwaynatics try to stop the violence by working directly with young people to provide alternative positive activity. Founded in memory of Dwayne Simpson, who was tragically stabbed in 2014 in Brixton at the age of 20, Dwaynatics supports young people through boxing and mentoring programmes.

“This club has helped hundreds of young people to build their skills, confidence and life opportunities and without this kind of service, many of them may have ended up leading a life of crime or even worse, they could have lost their lives.” [Lorraine Jones, Dwaynatics](#)

Crisis point intervention to provide emergency relief

We also know that crisis point intervention is key, where community organisations play a crucial role in understanding the local context, the key players and the communities within which they operate.

Chaos Theory employs Violence Interrupters and outreach workers with first-hand knowledge of ‘street life’ and offending behaviour. They use their credibility, influence and street relationships to detect brewing conflicts and mediate them before they erupt into violence. In the six months to December 2017, their Violence Interrupters successfully managed to mediate and address 14 conflicts that would otherwise have resulted in serious violence (i.e. a stabbing or shooting).

This type of immediate and sensitive intervention cannot be delivered by current statutory services, police or large middle tier organisations, as they do not share the same level of trust or strength of relationships within these communities.

Winston Goode, founder of Juvenis, works directly with young people in the community to mediate ongoing conflicts and tensions to prevent further retaliations after a critical incident. Following a fatal stabbing in Tulse Hill on New Year’s Eve in 2018, Winston’s work was recognised as being instrumental in de-escalating the violence, by supporting witnesses and victims and in preventing retaliations:

“The work that you [Juvenis] and the wider community and partners do is critical to ensure that these situations don’t escalate further. The community voices are much more effective with the young people than our own, and your support is critical and very much appreciated.” [Ian Howells, Chief inspector for Neighbourhoods and Gangs](#)

Street Doctors advocate a different type of crisis intervention, educating young people about the physical implications and dangers of using a weapon and teaching critical lifesaving skills to young people so they can administer first aid if someone has been wounded. This is important as it places the responsibility and knowledge directly with the young people themselves.

Outreach work is another critical point of contact, recognizing that we cannot rely on young people in crisis to ask for help or to walk into a support session. This type of work requires trust, local knowledge and respect, which is where local community groups play an essential role.

“Outreach is so important. Every time we hit the road within our community, it is an outreach mechanism.” [Peter St Aubyn, Code 7](#)

Rehabilitation to provide after care

Prison in-reach programmes, such as those delivered by Spark2Life, offer quality rehabilitation and reintegration where probation is arguably failing.

Spark2Life offer mentoring and coaching to develop concrete solutions for offenders. Their view is that, whilst the notion of probation as it was first intended is valuable, probation officers are often overstretched. This can result in transactional relationships with a focus on improving statistics rather than finding real-life opportunities for people. This works for the system but not for the young person.

“Probation has lost its way. Community groups provide the personal trusting relationships and in-depth support. Community groups do what probation used to do. The vacuum is filled by small charities.” [Paul Dayes, Outreach worker at Spark2Life and founder of Egangs](#)

They also recognise that identity, culture, belief and belonging are all contributing factors. Faith is an important consideration often overlooked because statutory programmes are secular. However, allowing individuals the space to explore and discuss their beliefs and their identity is an important part of any intervention:

“To talk about God is to explore the moral compass of many BAME offenders and to understand their context and identity. Community groups also recognise and respond to the belief system, a code of honour which means more to those individuals in question than the code of law.” [Dez Brown, Spark2 Life](#)

Juvenis’ Positive Change programme in Lambeth provides opportunities for young people who may not be deemed ready for standard employability programmes because they are not close enough to being job ready. Others, such as Project 507, offer in-prison work to help young people to develop business ideas and write a business plan. They offer longer term support outside the prison gates and even after the grant funded programme has come to an end to help them to find viable and valuable options and opportunities.

All community based- organisations who continue to deliver after care programmes for ex-offenders understand the importance of being a consistent, reliable presence for young people.

“You get a lot of credit for being around so long. When you help someone, then they’ve gone back to jail ‘cos he couldn’t resist the temptation of a robbery, [it is important that] when he has been and gone and come back, he sees that Code 7 will always be there.” [Peter St Aubyn, Code 7](#)

3. What is the long-term cure?

Throughout early action, crisis point intervention, and rehabilitation, community- based organisations play a unique role in reducing the rise in youth violence. Any long-term strategy to tackle the problem needs to have the community response at the heart of it: these organisations have the trust, connections and knowledge to respond quickly and directly to the issues on the ground.

“Community Organisations are the ones who are stopping people being killed, or stepping in when people are being failed by the system”. [Whitney Iles, Project 507](#)

Supporting front line practitioners

Many organisations have staff that are experts in their field and have dedicated their working life to supporting the most vulnerable. Often in the area of youth violence, staff or volunteers are former service users, former young offenders who have gone through the system or know someone who has.

“Someone who hasn’t been to prison doesn’t know what it’s about.” [Julien, Violence Interrupter, Chaos Theory](#)

Their ‘lived experience’ is something that funders regularly look for, as they are trusted and can engage beneficiaries. However, due to the difficult, round the clock and often high-risk work, practitioners can burn out. Activities such as meeting service users at the prison gates, helping ex-offenders find suitable housing, working with bereaved parents and families, supporting a young person to get a job, and helping someone work through the trauma of seeing a friend get murdered, are all extremely distressing challenges to manage.

This is high intensity youth work, dealing with accounts of violence and crime that are difficult to handle. To encourage and continue high quality front line delivery, it is important to support these community experts by providing training to develop their skills and knowledge and by funding therapeutic support.

“An area of need is to raise the money to get the smaller organisations the clinical supervision they need, leading to a better, more robust system of support.” [Whitney Iles, Project 507](#)

Investing in community-based organisations

Community-based organisations recognise the local need and have direct access to the most vulnerable people in the community. Larger organisations, without local connections, struggle to do the same.

However, most interviewees claim that funding programmes often seem exclusive, favouring larger middle-tier organisations with bigger capacity and budget. As an example, one national funder gave a two-week application window and allowed three months to spend grants of £20,000. Small groups that operate with limited resource and on very low budget struggle to compete.

“This needs to be community led, not big organisations parachuting in just to tick boxes and leave when funding dries up.” [Winston Goode, founder of Juvenis and Project Manager at South Central Youth](#)

Investing in community-based organisations, particularly by providing core funding, enables them to plan and deliver activity in direct response to the need they are seeing in their community. Allowing organisations the opportunity to cover costs and build in salaried time for proper pre-and post-project planning, mapping and evaluation will also result in better evidence and impact.

Encouraging a long-term, multi-agency response

Community-based organisations know their area and understand the other key players in the field. Due to the smaller size and local nature of community-based organisations, the initiatives are often place based and focused on a particular demographic or community. However, as the Youth Violence Commission's Evidence Session on Youth Services and Community Work^{xxiii} points out, smaller charities working on similar issues (such as reducing knife crime) can often find it difficult to collaborate because they need to compete for and protect their funding.

This siloed working can be reduced if larger organisations collaborate with and support grassroots organisations, delivering shared projects or working in partnership to bid for funds for example.

There also needs to be an effective multi-agency collaboration across sectors that listens to and includes the community voice in developing pan London strategies; working together across health, justice, police, education and community, to develop and deliver community based solutions that can be replicated and scaled. However, what we often see is that smaller organisations are asked for their input at the early stages of gathering information, but are left out of the strategy and policy development.

“People are always getting their brains picked and asked questions but then not listened to further up the line. There is definitely a glass ceiling. We should involve practitioners throughout the process. So they can make recommendations that are actually picked up and led by those community representatives who are championing them.” [Dr Mahamed Hashi & Abdul Karim](#)

The London Community Foundation's Path Programme, funded by the Evening Standard Dispossessed Fund and the Office for Civil Society, and coordinated by the Safer London Foundation, supported 13 community-based organisations to work together to facilitate pathways out of negative gang related activity. The collaboration reached over 600 young people with 61 per cent moving away from anti-social behaviour and 57 per cent moving away from criminal activity. 41 per cent entered employment, education or training and the groups made over 151 new connections with organisations that could complement their work.

These successes, as well as cross-agency consultation, information sharing and multi-partnership working, were tangible benefits of the programme. However this two-year initiative also served to evidence the need for longer term, joined up support. Many organisations reported that the strong relations with young people as well as with cross agency partners, borough leads and other relevant stakeholders, had just started to develop when the programme came to an end.

Community-based organisations do deliver valuable interventions with evidenced success when they are given the finance and the support to do so. However, when this support dries up or is allocated elsewhere, valuable opportunities to build on their successes and to reach yet more young people in need and in crisis, are then tragically missed.

Conclusion

“Violence can be prevented and its impact reduced, in the same way that public health efforts have prevented and reduced pregnancy-related complications, workplace injuries, infectious diseases, and illness [...] The factors that contribute to violent responses – whether they are factors of attitude and behaviour or related to larger social, economic, political and cultural conditions – can be changed. Violence can be prevented.” [World Health Organisation report: Violence- A global Public Health Problem](#)

Community-based organisations play a unique role in the battle against youth violence. They have the trust, the connections and the knowledge to provide treatment at all stages of the epidemic; through prevention, emergency response and rehabilitation.

Community-based organisations offer opportunities and life- saving support through homework clubs, football, boxing, drama, music, life coaching, group workshops, one-to-one support, therapeutic care, crisis intervention and advocacy work.

The common approach is person centred, tailored to engaging the most vulnerable young people and those directly involved in or at-risk of violence. These organisations provide a safe, trusted place to be a child: to learn, to play, to feel safe, to explore themselves and to try to improve their lives.

To understand and actively tackle the increase in youth violence we need a humanitarian approach that acknowledges the causes, treatment and cure, but importantly, also integrates the community voice into the strategic partnership, working across sectors to develop a long-term response.

We need communities to work side by side with services such as the police, probation, health and housing, to work together to plan and deliver this long-term response. When we trust, listen to and support community-based organisations to develop and deliver their response alongside the wider government, police, schools, Local Authorities, and prison service response, we stand a better chance of curing the youth violence virus within London’s communities.

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- ⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/feb/21/two-men-stabbed-to-death-camden-north-london>
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.london.gov.uk/about-us/london-assembly/london-assembly-publications/gun-crime-london>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/26/europe/london-acid-attacks-2017-intl/index.html>
- ^{iv} http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/sarah-jones3/government-knife-crime_b_18434970.html
- ^v <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/29/europe/london-acid-attacks/index.html>
- ^{vi} "Social Media as a Catalyst and Trigger for Youth Violence"
- ^{vii} <http://www.actiononviolence.org.uk/>
- ^{viii} in a 2011 Best Value and Audit Report for Strathclyde Police
- ^{ix} https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/216977/Violence-prevention.pdf
- ^x http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/global_campaign/en/chap2.pdf
- ^{xi} <https://acestoohigh.com/2014/07/07/how-childhood-trauma-could-be-mistaken-for-adhd/>
- ^{xii} <http://cureviolence.org/>
- ^{xiii} Institute for Public Policy Research <https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-10/making-the-difference-summary-october-2017.pdf>
- ^{xiv} <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/family/inside-school-children-excluded-young-five/>
- ^{xv} Institute for Public Policy Research <https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-10/making-the-difference-summary-october-2017.pdf>
- ^{xvi} <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/oct/10/school-exclusion-figures-date-england-only-tip-iceberg>
- ^{xvii} <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/oct/10/school-exclusion-figures-date-england-only-tip-iceberg>
- ^{xviii} Moving on up initiative <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/news/employment-initiative-helps-100s-young-black-men-london/>
- ^{xix} <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/apr/15/bame-graduates-25-times-more-likely-to-be-jobless-than-white-peers>
- ^{xx} https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2018_03_20_sb_londons_lost_youth_services_2018_final.pdf
- ^{xxi} <http://londonyouth.org/news-and-events/blog/london-youths-response-to-the-budget/>
- ^{xxii} https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london_lost_youth_services_sian_berry_jan2017.pdf
- ^{xxiii} <http://yvcommission.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Briefing-Note-Youth-Services-Evidence-Session.pdf>