



All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Youth Affairs, Foyers, and Child & Youth Crime

Chair:	Dawn Butler MP	David Lepper MP	Mike Penning MP
Vice-Chair:	Simon Hughes MP	Baroness Sharp of Guildford	Sadiq Khan MP
Vice-Chair:	Peter Bottomley MP	Sir George Young MP	Jenny Willott MP

Young people are increasingly concerned about the lack of an overarching government strategy to reduce the incidences of gun, gang and knife crime related offences. Joining gangs is not a new phenomenon. However, the spread of anti-social behaviour and violent crime is something that cannot go unchecked. Once a gang member, young people find themselves drawn into drug use and crime that is difficult to halt.

As the government prepares to unveil its Youth Crime Action Plan and its Green Paper on the Resettlement of young people it is important not to criminalise or stereotype young people, and not to undermine work done elsewhere to promote the positive contribution that young people make in their communities.

This joint meeting between the APPGs on Youth Affairs, Foyers and Child and Youth Crime is an opportunity for young people and policymakers to explore ways to produce positive solutions to this complex issue.

The impact of gangs

We call on parliament to protect young people's freedom to association without creating a climate in which gangs will thrive; to meet and spend time together without fear of criminalisation or exclusion. Programmes to address the problem of gangs should be promoted, focusing on reducing the likelihood of young people joining gangs, addressing underlying causes of gang violence, promoting positive dialogue among different communities; and rehabilitation of ex-gang members into the community.

Investing in early interventions

We call on the government to shift the weight of its investment from the purchase of places in custody to schemes that seek earlier intervention. To prevent offending, we ask that a full range of alternatives to detention be available for children and young people, including youth opportunities and parenting support, with imprisonment only being used as a last resort.

The media portrayal of young people

We call on the media and politicians to take a responsible approach to the portrayal of young people, reflecting the reality of young people and crime and not exploiting negative stereotypes of young people. Does media coverage of gun, knife or gang crime help decision-makers to take action or raise awareness amongst young people? Or, does it provoke an unfair portrayal of young people or the amount of this type of crime committed by young people? In its research BYC found that young people feel negatively stereotyped by the media and in society. In a survey of over 700 young people for the *Respect?* campaign run by BYC and the online charity YouthNet, more than 4 in 5 young people feel they are always or often represented by the media as a group to be feared. 97% of young people feel they are always or sometimes presented in this way.

- 69 teenagers are victims of knife crime every week in London and nearly half of all murders are carried out with a knife (Metropolitan Police - www.itsnotagame.org/).
- Last year, 26 teenagers were killed in London - nine in shootings - and 13 have died so far this year. There were 566 serious or fatal incidents involving guns across the UK.
- The Met police estimated that more than 170 gangs were operating in London, and this month admitted that attempts to crack down on knife crime had not solved the problem.
- Now 28 teenagers have died in knife attacks this year - young men (and a few young women) whose lives had hardly begun. "...The impression that knife crime is out of control is now so overwhelming that it has become almost impossible to correct". (Guardian Leader, Tuesday 27 May 2008).
- A Mori survey for the Youth Justice Board found knife-carrying to be associated with those who were or who felt themselves to be victims, and thought arming themselves would raise their status.
- A survey of 355 people aged 16 to 24 in London, Manchester and Bristol by Tuned In found 30 per cent said it was acceptable sometimes to carry a knife while 23 per cent would use one. One in 10 claimed to have had access to a gun. A third admitted that fear of gun and knife crime affected where they went out socially while 34 per cent believed that they would witness a knife attack.

Supporting Organisations:

YMCA England

YMCA England engages with issues of youth justice through its work with young people in young offender institutions, and the work of local YMCAs engaged in crime diversion projects and the provision of supported accommodation for ex-offenders in the community. YMCA England is one of a few organisations to have an Alliance with the Youth Justice Board. Last year it undertook in-depth research and published a report on youth justice in England, holding a seminar with young people about their experiences with the justice system, and partnering with Y Care International on an international campaign, *Youth Justice in Action*. The Youth Justice in Action campaign focuses on the failure to deal with gangs; how those in conflict with the law are targets of intimidation and violence; the impact of poverty; overuse of detention, and media portrayal of young people. YMCA England is committed to helping young people in need and has been for more than 160 years. We aim to assist young people develop holistically: in mind, body and spirit. For more information on the 135 local YMCAs, visit: www.ymca.org.uk.

The British Youth Council

The British Youth Council (BYC) is led by young people for young people, aged 26 and under, across the UK. This year BYC is celebrating 60 years of empowering young people to have a say and be heard. BYC sought the views of young people through an online survey to take a snapshot of young people's opinion on gun, knife and gang crime. BYC asked why they thought other young people might carry knives or guns or get involved in gangs, and what they think needs to be done to tackle young people's involvement in this type of crime.

BYC thinks it is important that young people should become part of the solution, not just seen as the problem. Solutions for young people are undoubtedly more effective when young people help to design them themselves; the participation of young people in constructive debate on this issue is crucial. BYC will share the experiences of the young people attending the APPG today through a video on BYCTV on www.byc.org.uk. This activity for the APPG was funded by the *Speaking Out* Small Grants Programme.

NCVYS

In the last year NCVYS, as part of the *Speaking Out* project in partnership with the National Council of Voluntary Child-Care Organisations (NCVCCO), has held two seminars on knife, gun and gang crime, in Birmingham and London. The events allowed members to join government officials and formulate recommendations for policymakers to create an effective response to problems around knife, gun and gang crime, and young people. Recommendations focused on early intervention, involvement of peers and parents from the community and exit routes away from gang or criminal activities. *Speaking Out* has published policy papers including *Gang, Gun and Knife Crime: Seeking Solutions* which advocates that multi-agency work, involving both voluntary and statutory sectors, is crucial to responding effectively to this complex issue and requires an appropriate mix of enforcement and prevention. Further information visit: www.ncvys.org.uk

Foyer Federation

The Foyer Federation incubates and pilots new initiatives to support those young people who find the transition to adulthood particularly challenging. We work through a network of integrated learning and accommodation centres (Foyers) that provide safe, quality assured environments, which reconnect young people with education, training and employment opportunities. It launched its pan-London anti-gun and knife campaign in January 2008 as a direct response to concern raised by young people in their local community. By working with a group of young people, the following policy areas were identified:

- Early intervention: parenting, citizenship, role models, education and poverty.
- Perception of young people: glamorizing crime and changing media's outlook on young people, ghettoisation and victimization.
- Making guns less available: immediate crushing of guns, increased costs of bullets and guns, boarder line control.

Kids Count

Kids Count was founded in response to the growing problems faced by children and young people, along with the failure of existing organisations to find suitable solutions to these issues. Kids Count is a grass-roots Think-Tank aiming to find practical solutions to the broad spectrum of issues that affect children and young people in urban and rural communities. Kids Count believes that young people should be involved in the solution finding process. Kids Count believes that although social injustice is a key contributor to many of these problems, poverty is not the only factor. Children from all social backgrounds can be the victims of bullying or abuse, have problems with drugs and alcohol, or be involved with crime. Kids Count has been campaigning on the issues of gun, knife and youth crime since 2005. Kids Count has been working with leading agencies and will be launching a document on knife crime next month. Kids Count provides the secretariat to the APPG on Child and Youth Crime.