

# Community Development A Tool to Reducing Group and Gang Violence in London.

## Introduction

This paper is based on the qualitative and reflective experience of three practitioners working with communities who experience group and gang violence (GGV) in London. It sets out key recommendations about how community development can support local communities to reduce group and gang violence. It concludes that community development plays a crucial role in:

1. Helping to develop practical ways to reducing future violence.
2. Responding to the grief of families and communities who experience the consequences of violence.

## Background

The evidence is drawn from the direct experience of working in North Brixton, Lambeth, Haringey and Westminster over 5 years. The organisations involved were Big Local (<http://localtrust.org.uk/get-involved/about-big-local>), and the Community Development Foundation (CDF <http://www.cdf.org.uk/>). The practitioners held specific roles; one was embedded in the Big Local in North Brixton whilst the other had dual capacity, as an Associate with (CDF) and also on-going experience working for (BL) in other areas. This gave a unique opportunity to observe how community development principles could be utilised to great effect within this specific issue.

Big Local aims are to engage with the community and support those who wish to lead in seeking solutions and enabling a safer place in which to live. The CDF involvement was part of a commission by The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) at the end of May 2015 to develop a community voice in the London Boroughs of Lambeth, Haringey and Westminster. It aimed to reduce group and gang violence (GGV).

This paper is drawn from different ways of working with communities, including;

- Direct and indirect work
- Observation
- Engagement in informal, un recognised and relationship based activities.
- Independent and unbiased facilitation to bring different participants together

All of the above address power imbalances and the needs of the community and are fundamental roles for community development. When a community development approach is used there is;

- A more successful community response in managing the complexity of GGV.
- A more collective aim in stopping the issue from increasing is developed.
- Support for those involved or affected by GGV is offered.

There is sufficient preliminary evidence to pilot this approach in neighbourhoods affected by GGV, with the aim of now gaining a more substantive evidence base of the efficacy of using a community development model to reduce GGV.

## Group and Gang Violence- the context

Group and gang violence is an increasing concern with 225 recognised gangs in London, comprising around 3,600 gang members (of these 58 gangs are considered particularly active). This relatively small number of people are responsible for approximately 17% of serious violence and stabbings, 7% of personal robbery, 40% of shootings and 12% of aggravated burglary in London<sup>1</sup>. Overall levels are increasing as it is estimated that in 2015 violent offences in London increased by 27%<sup>2</sup>.

Whilst there is a growth in the need for services for young people and the community, both services are being cut. UNISON's research from 168 local authorities across the UK, shows that youth services between 2012 and 2014 lost:

- More than £60 million of funding
- More than 2000 jobs
- Around 350 youth centres
- 41,000 youth service places for young people
- At least 35,000 hours of outreach work by youth workers<sup>3</sup>

Within wider public services there has been continuing cuts to services throughout the UK. In London local government has seen a 60 per cent real terms reduction in core funding between 2011 and 2014<sup>4</sup>. This is having a significant impact with the Local Government Association claiming that *"As a result of these cuts councils in many areas will not have enough money to meet all their statutory responsibilities"*<sup>5</sup>

In addition, during this period community and voluntary sector organisations have faced increased funding challenges and a need to take on statutory work whether formally or informally i.e. filling the gaps. The declining investment in support for communities and young people is impacting on communities and agencies efforts to reduce gang related violence.

With the shrinking of public services and the increased funding challenges for community and voluntary sector organisations there is now a steadily increasing need for communities to fill the gap and play more of an active role in reducing group and gang related violence. Public sector, voluntary sector and community sector each want the same outcome but are driven by different priorities (and performance indicators.) Each stakeholder has to achieve more and do more with less.

## The role of Community Development

There is a key role and range of activity for community development in the following 5 key inputs:

1. **Programme of neighbourhood and borough based community development activity to identify, establish, form and strengthen community networks and a local voice.**

Community Development is the key to building a picture of the people, connections and communication within communities. Community mobilisation is a key element of one of the

---

<sup>1</sup> How many gangs are there in London? (2016) Metropolitan Police. Can be found at: <http://content.met.police.uk/Article/FAQs/1400014987691/1400014987691>

<sup>2</sup> Official Crime Statistics 2016

<sup>3</sup> The UK's youth services how cuts are removing opportunities for young people and damaging their lives (2014) Unison. Can be found at: <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/07/On-line-Catalogue225322.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> London Councils Parliamentary Briefing (18<sup>th</sup> November 2014) London Councils

<sup>5</sup> Under Pressure: How Councils are planning for future cuts (2014) Local Government Association

most coherent, and best-evaluated, gang interventions, comprehensive Gang Programmes<sup>6</sup>. This was developed by the US Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) in 1993<sup>7</sup>. Professor David Kennedy also highlighted that communities may be far more effective at deterring crimes than legal authorities<sup>8</sup>.

Community development activity can play, and in our experience does play, a key role in building the networks of community assets through which to seek solutions by;

- Establishing who is who in the community
- Engaging in one to one dialogue about their experience of group violence,
- Identifying practices which based on evidence are successful
- Building a picture of how the network could work to help reduce group violence.

This approach relies on open and honest conversations being held, and relationships being built up through independent facilitation. It allows individuals to invite other people to join the discussion and signpost other connections who should be followed up. It recognises much of the informal work taking place “under the radar” and the impact this has within communities.

In this area of work there are many overlaps and there are multiple community stakeholders who often wear a number of ‘hats’. This needs to be acknowledged and worked through; how they are engaged in this work, their relationships with each other and with the statutory agencies as these multiple relationships are really important. The one to one engagement carried out builds common understandings across diverse interests and creates a level platform of understanding which enables larger meetings to be convened. There are still issues and differences of opinion but there is enough of a common opinion and desire to achieve change that the meetings can be focused and facilitated to a common outcome.

Once contacts have been made and relationships built, experience shows that different people will be involved with different agendas and/or agencies and that networks are and can be created that span all levels of involvement and engagement.

Skilled external facilitation is key in building the level ground on which to progress as some communities/organisations are and feel very excluded from the conversation, and in many forums there are often real or perceived “favourites” who information is shared with.

The development and focus of both emerging and existing networks and partnerships as well as the creation of neighbourhood networks and local networks of affected communities and parents who want to see an end to group and gang violence, provide the basis and link into a Pan-London community network.

For example, in Haringey the community want to link up to the wider Pan-London network Stop Our Kids Being Killed On Our Streets group, which has over 6,000 people in London engaged, and is now forming sub groups to work on taking action.

This strategy involves building on the local networks, providing support to define the role for these networks, developing their influence with statutory providers, particularly local policing agencies and working to enable people to understand them, and what is asked of them.

*The network can be a resource in terms of finding people who are:*

---

<sup>6</sup> Deterrence and Crime Prevention: Reconsidering the Prospect of Sanction (2008) Prof David Kennedy

<sup>7</sup> Reluctant Gangsters: Youth Gangs in Waltham Forest. (2007) John Pitts, University of Bedfordshire

<sup>8</sup> Deterrence and Crime Prevention: Reconsidering the Prospect of Sanction (2008) Prof David Kennedy

- a) *Linked closely to the young people at risk, thinking about locally based action to reduce violence, and spreading the message against violence.*
- b) *Credible to the gang members i.e. Families of people involved in gangs, ex-gang members and faith leaders who are willing to speak out and make a stand against violence in their community,*
- c) *Providing local 'intelligence' within and across the community to support confident responses within the community to both existing and emerging challenges and opportunities, with the potential to pre-empt the need for the enforcement approaches implemented by Statutory agencies (Reference Prof David Kennedy).*

**Outcome: Established networks and partnerships of local assets within communities which support a cohesive local voice to reduce group and gang violence.**

## **2. Building on the network activity above to develop a programme of mapping; capacity building and facilitation to develop the voice and the role of voice within the decision making processes across sectors.**

In all local areas there are community groups and individuals providing help and support to young people. Many of the groups and the range of support they provide will be completely unknown to the statutory agencies, and to each other. Yet they are valuable resources in terms of their local knowledge, what they are providing and how they work with young people.

Through the community networks, meetings and the building and strengthening of community networks, the community development function is able to map and link much of this local support activity. By building the map it enables both communities and agencies to understand more about what is on offer and what is being provided, by who, who is using / accessing the offer and in what geographical area. It also starts to provide a picture of the real cost and value of provision.

Through the CDF work this mapping was carried out in Haringey. It helped both statutory and community partners understand more about the bigger picture. The 'map' provided a tool to understand what was going on in the area to reduce group and gang violence by providing information, links and ideas about sources for help.

### *Brokering and relationship development and management between the community networks; Capacity Building & Facilitation*

- a) *Linked decision making and common understanding of process between different partners all wanting the same outcomes but working to different priorities;*
- b) *Decision making and information sharing which is reliable, accurate and appropriate and therefore linked closely to the young people at risk, thinking about locally based action to reduce violence, and spreading the message against violence.*

### *Mapping & Information Sharing*

- c) *Information sharing which is credible to the gang members i.e. Families of people involved in gangs, ex-gang members and faith leaders who are willing to speak out and make a stand against violence in their community,*
- d) *Provision of local 'intelligence' within and across the community to support confident responses within the community to both existing and emerging challenges and opportunities, with the potential to pre-empt the need for the enforcement approaches implemented by Statutory agencies (Reference Prof David Kennedy)*

**Outcome: Sharing information, access and support across sectors to reduce group and gang violence**

**3. Support and broker organisational culture change across sectors to engage with and value local community networks within decision making processes around group and gang violence**

In order to embed this way of working to tackle group violence, there needs to be an appetite from statutory partners and communities that working together is the only way to achieve results. This requires an acknowledgement from statutory partners that they need to work in this way.

There needs to be a willingness to listen and learn, an openness and lack of defensiveness, and strong local leadership in order to work with communities as trusted partners and equals at all stages of the process.

Partnership working also relies on communities acknowledging that statutory partners really want to make a difference on the ground, and are not just the people to be blamed when things go wrong. There needs to be willingness on both sides to make this a productive and useful partnership. A key role for community development is that of independent unbiased facilitation - bringing partners and communities together to work in this way and enabling them to understand the benefits that partnership working bring to all stakeholders.

**Outcome: Partnership working and a culture change enabling including wider participation in decision making around group and gang violence**

**4. Pilot a measurement system for establishing the cost/benefits of working in this way, and of using new commissioning and procurement principles to do this.**

The voluntary and community sector has been hit hard by funding cuts, and the change from grants to commissioned services. The public sector is hard hit also, and is having to focus on providing statutory and essential services.

Through mapping service provision and users of the provision, information becomes available to support the commissioning of many services or offers by community and voluntary sector providers who are established and delivering services. Commissioning and procurement routes should be used in order to make this happen.

By targeting provision and pooling budgets, (including from police or public health) community development informed commissioning provides a transparent and accountable approach to the challenges of funding.

The Our Place model (see [MyCommunityrights.org.uk](http://MyCommunityrights.org.uk)) shows that looking at a cost benefit analysis approach to service delivery can achieve better results and innovative ways of looking at budgets. If the cost of one death is £1.5m<sup>9</sup> then even a moderate level of investment in community based preventative and exit work achieves a good level of payback very rapidly.

If local groups do not have the right capacity in order to be able to provide services, supporting them so that they are able to develop in order to be able to do this or finding other local groups

---

<sup>9</sup> (The economic and social costs of crime against individuals and households Home Office 2003/04),

who can act as mentors or guarantors for the work, provides the basis for a changed delivery methodology which should then lead to a positive cost benefit result.

Budget pooling and new ways of commissioning services could be considered and pilot ways of measuring cost benefit analysis for this approach should be tested.

**Outcome: A framework for cross sectors for pooling of budgets and resources to reduce group and gang violence**

**5. Building on the development of the Roles 1-4 the development of safe and productive systems for better information sharing and cooperation at agency level about the link between gang related activity and group violence and serious and organised crime.**

Information from communities across the boroughs/ neighbourhoods in which we have experience highlights that there is clearly a strong overlap between those involved in group violence and those involved in organised crime.

Concerns have been raised about the fact that due to the way in which information is gathered, for example the Metropolitan Police maintain the gang nominal index and the National Crime Agency maintain the Serious and Organised Crime data, (SOCA) that these issues are looked at as being separate and unrelated, when in fact they overlap substantially.

This separation also leads to fears of racial profiling, for example in one area that we work, there are perceptions that many of the young “foot-soldiers” are black, whilst the people on the SOCA list are Turkish. This then leads to a view that young black men are being targeted as gang nominals, whilst those that lead are not targeted.

**Outcome: Improved systems and processes for sharing information and participating in decision making**

## **Conclusion**

This paper highlights the need to develop, fund and implement a proactive approach to target resources at community development support in neighbourhoods most affected by group and gang violence. It sets out key activities and the role community development can play in supporting local communities to reduce group and gang violence. It highlights the need to implement an approach where community development facilitators develop a co-production model in working with communities most affected in London. Embedding community development skills and facilitation within both communities of residents and organisations is a key building block to develop robust intelligence and partnership responses to gang and gang violence.

*Paul Bragman - Worked in Haringey, Lambeth & Westminster to support the development of a ‘Community Voice’ as part of a multi-agency approach to reduce group and gang violence in London with the Community Development Foundation for MOPAC. Paul is also a Big Local Rep for the Barnfield Estate in Greenwich and Farley Hill in Luton.*

*Sian Penner – Worked in Westminster, Lambeth and Hackney in various roles to support community’s living with gangs and violent crime. Sian is currently a Big Local Rep in North Brixton and Hackney. In North Brixton she is working with community based organisations, gang and ex-gang members, both male and female to support change. For the North Brixton community addressing the ongoing violence across the area is key to all priorities for the ongoing development of the community response.*

*Alice Wilcock – Worked in Haringey, Lambeth & Westminster to support the development of a “Community Voice” as part of a multi-agency approach to reduce group and gang violence in London with the Community Development Foundation for MOPAC. Alice also worked as a Big Local Rep in Waltham Forest.*

*July 2016*