

Beyond
YOUTH CUSTODY

**GANG-INVOLVED
YOUNG PEOPLE
CUSTODY AND BEYOND**



LOTTERY FUNDED

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Background to the report

This report is based upon a review of the English language literature on the rehabilitation of gang-involved young people aged between 10 and 25. The information in the literature review is augmented by interviews with policy makers and practitioners. The fieldwork was undertaken between October and December 2014.

27 professionals attended focus groups in the south-east and north-west of England at which findings from the literature review and the challenges faced by practitioners were explored. Additionally, interviews with resettlement professionals and young people were conducted at six sites. The young people were either in custody or had recently served custodial sentences for gang-related offences. 19 young people aged between 16 and 25 were interviewed, three of whom were female. In addition, eight interviews were conducted with professionals responsible for resettlement programmes both in custody and the community.

2. Issues in custody

The youth custodial population has fallen sharply in recent years with the decline being particularly sharp for those aged under 18. Those who are imprisoned are likely to have a more serious offending profile and more complex needs. Not surprisingly, this group poses many challenges for those working in the secure estate and resettlement programmes.

Gangs in prisons are a source of growing concern. In 2013/14, 16% of boys in young offender institutions (YOIs) reported having experienced 'gang problems' when they first arrived at the establishment (rising to 21% for black and minority ethnic (BME) young people). Whilst this report is focused upon resettlement, it is clear that what happens in the secure estate has a significant impact on how these young people engage with resettlement services.

A recent inspection of Feltham 'A' YOI (which holds boys aged under 18) noted that 48 gangs were represented in the establishment and the gang problem in the secure estate as a whole was described as 'seemingly intractable' by the Chief Inspector of Prisons (HMIP, 2015).

Gang-involved young people tend to be concentrated in a handful of penal establishments, leading to a potential reinforcement of gang identity, and pressure on previously unaffiliated young people to align themselves with particular groups to enhance their own safety.

Conversely, in an attempt to break down gang affiliations, some gang-involved young people may be dispersed to institutions far away from their homes. This can mean that gang activity might be 'exported' to institutions located away from areas that have traditionally been associated with gang problems.

A recent report (Hughes et al, 2015), identifies the high rate of mental illness among young people involved with gangs. Additionally, the centrality of serious violence within the gang places gang-involved young people at serious risk of poor mental health.

Professionals involved in the delivery of programmes in the secure estate echoed these concerns. They believed that there were too few prison officers with the skills and knowledge to work with gang-involved young people and gang violence in particular. This led to the frequent recourse to 'lockdown' and punishments that prevented many gang-involved young people gaining access to personal development programmes designed to tackle gang violence or attending the educational classes on offer.

One of the differences between the experiences of gang-involved young people and other returning prisoners is that many will have been involved in gang-desistance programmes prior to their incarceration. Youth workers and mentors in these programmes emphasise the importance of maintaining contact with these young people during their period of incarceration in order that the desistance work in which they had been involved will not be undermined while they are in the prison or the YOI.

The key to successful and sustained intervention appears to be making contact fairly early in the young person's sentence, personalising that contact via handwritten letters and visits from one identified worker, rather than printed or typed letters or brochures with a 'take it or leave it' contact address, and, crucially, for the support worker to do what they say they are going to do and to give the young person regular feedback about decisions that affect them.

The role of education

Research suggests that education can offer the inmate a route to success upon release. However, evidence shows that prisoners of widely different abilities and at very different stages of their educational careers were frequently put together in YOIs.

A concern was expressed that, with the implementation of the new regime of 30 hours a week of education in YOIs, if no attempt is made to make it relevant and interesting for each of the inmates, it could increase the likelihood of violence, not least because it could mean that the young people are denied access to the gym and other sporting facilities.

Much of the gang-related violence in prisons and YOIs 'kicked off' during education classes. There is a high level of undiagnosed learning disabilities and mental health needs within the prison population and the early use of screening tools could avoid many situations in which these problems exacerbate the violence. Additionally, it appears that there is no specialised training for teachers in penal institutions.

For gang-involved young people leaving custody it is important that clear arrangements are put in place to ensure that they can continue with their education. Arrangements for suitable placements in schools or colleges are often made extremely late, or indeed, in one case we heard of, not at all.

3. Gang-involved young people and desistance

Desistance from crime is a process rather than an event. There are a number of points or situations where gang-involved young people may desist from gang crime. However, desisting from gang crime does not necessarily mean leaving the gang. Although research suggests that dissociation from delinquent peers facilitates desistance, for those who have been embroiled in serious gang conflict, continued involvement may well be a prerequisite of personal safety.

Young people may desist from gang crime and intensive gang involvement following the death or serious injury of a friend or relative. Indeed, researchers have observed that constant exposure to violence may promote desistance. Some young people desist when they make the transition from school to college, while others step back from gang involvement when they set up home with a partner or when they become a parent.

The one consistent finding from desistance research is that age is a major determinant of desistance from crime in general and gang involvement and gang crime in particular. The 'drop-out rate' from gangs between the early teens and the mid-20s is over 75%, suggesting that most young people 'mature out' of gang involvement.

4. Resettlement services: current context

Some resettlement providers have welcomed the extension of statutory post-custody supervision commended by the government's *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme to those who previously did not benefit from any statutory support on release. From the point of view of gang-involved young

people this might provide an opportunity to maximise the potential for taking advantage of the 'window of opportunity' that the transition from custody to the community involves.

Effective intervention with returning gang members requires the participation of different agencies and organisations and evidence suggests that this is best achieved via co-located, community-based, gang-desistance programmes. Critical components of successful partnerships proved to be a combination of well-established arrangements, sufficient resources, particularly staff time, and a willingness and ability to share information.

Despite the fact that there are a number of programmes available to penal institutions, many provided by the voluntary sector, there is no central point where information about them is held; knowledge of the provision that could be available on release might well reduce tension within the institution.

A further difficulty for resettlement agencies is the recently introduced policy of moving prisoners to a resettlement prison in the final week or so of their sentence. This can mean that work done in the penal institution may come to nothing because the support worker loses touch with the prisoner at a crucial moment.

5. Applying lessons for practice

Beyond acknowledging individual differences, it is important for practitioners to recognise that for these young people, maturity seldom comes at 18 or 20. Protracted adolescence seems to be a characteristic of many gang-involved young people and this is exacerbated by imprisonment. Therefore service providers need to have realistic expectations of their clients.

Respondents felt that 'pathway planning'; breaking down the aspirations of prisoners into a series of easily achievable steps can be extremely useful, particularly if they are mentored by someone who has taken those steps themselves. Young people's support needs should be identified and negotiated with them at the point they are sentenced and, ideally, they should be followed through by the same worker. All respondents were agreed that sustained and consistent support was of paramount importance and that short-term commissioning should be avoided. Young people were clear that staff needed to demonstrate consistency and care if they were to build effective relationships with the young people.

There are particular times when recently released young people are likely to relapse into criminality, especially if they have had to be relocated. Services and individual support need to be available when young people are most likely to feel lonely and isolated, often on Friday nights and at weekends. 'Through the gate' services are recognised as a crucial element of effective resettlement.

Agencies need to recognise that mentors can be drawn from the whole of society and that an ex-gang-affiliated mentor does not always make the 'best fit' for a gang-involved young person leaving custody. Acknowledgement of the highly skilled nature of this work and its demands requires a level of care to reduce the chance of burn-out amongst team members.

Recognition that release from custody is stressful and can be traumatic for some is highlighted in other Beyond Youth Custody (BYC) publications. Notwithstanding the need for statutory engagement as part of the licence conditions, there is also a recognition on the part of young people we spoke to that sometimes they just want to be left alone. Being able to recognise these signs and hear these messages was deemed extremely valuable in the development of the relationship between support workers and young people.

Girls and young women

Practitioners who were surveyed suggested that girls and young women were involved in gang-related crime; storing drugs or firearms, or setting up attacks on rival gang members etc. However, their motivations for involvement are normally different and their role within the gang often places them at risk of victimisation. There is an increased awareness of the violent and sexual exploitation of gang-associated girls and women, probably as a result of recent research in this area.

The issues for girls and young women who are gang involved echo many of the concerns and recommendations raised in BYC's practitioner's guide on the resettlement of girls and young women published in 2014. The principles informing these resettlement services emphasise that they should be strengths based rather than deficit based, culturally relevant and gender specific, particularly in dealing with sexual assault and abuse.

Evidence exists that young people are very unlikely to report gang-related crime (including sexual violence) for a number of reasons including a lack of faith in the 'authorities' to keep them safe and fear of retaliation targeted either directly at them, or their loved ones. For many young people, and for young women in particular, it is also due to the broader normalisation of sexual violence and a frequent lack of recognition that a crime has been committed.

6. Practical challenges

There are a number of practical challenges that need to be addressed to prepare for the release of gang-involved young people.

- 1 Securing appropriate accommodation** which is long term, safe and secure and within reasonable distance of employment/educational opportunities. This is particularly crucial for those who have been relocated and needs to reflect the cultural needs of the young person concerned. Recognition that the removal of the young person from friends and family will be emotionally difficult is crucial for those supporting young people during their transition into the community. Eligibility criteria thresholds for relocation programmes are often judged to be too high and unrealistic. Young people will often need help in sustaining their tenancy as this will be a new experience for many.
- 2 Families** can often play a key role in helping the young person resettle. The researchers suggest that strategies to engage families must be attuned to local situations vis-à-vis gangs. Skilled practitioners are required to navigate the complex dynamics of family engagement, particularly when the safeguarding needs of children are considered. The researchers believe that there is a strong case for supporting beleaguered families with gang-involved young people as part of the *Troubled Families* programme, even where they fail to meet the strict eligibility criteria. They commend 'early intervention' before a young person's *on road* (gang) lifestyle is established.
- 3 Financial support.** Several practitioners suggested the provision of a 'resettlement pack' containing basic essentials to survive for the first few days would be a positive development. This would relieve a lot of the stress and anxiety, and for some, lessen the trauma of release. For gang-involved young people, the lack of financial support can be a problem that they resolve by returning to the gang and benefitting from its illicit activities in order to secure a regular income.
- 4 Employment, education and training.** The use of Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) could be expanded to ensure that inmates get the chance to attend relevant educational or volunteering opportunities and interviews prior to release. Having arrangements confirmed would alleviate the anxieties associated with uncertainty on leaving custody. Ensuring a structure to their day, by attending work or training was something young people recognised as helpful; distracting them from the temptation of returning to their previous criminal activity. Having to declare their criminal past at the point of applying for jobs was recognised by many as creating an unfair de-selection process prior to interview.

5 Licence conditions. Both young people and the professionals providing resettlement services were clear that the success of the resettlement process was predicated on the effectiveness of the multi-agency partnership responsible for supervising licence conditions upon release. It was important to develop these in consultation with the young person concerned, their family and any relevant project staff in order to maximise the opportunity for young people to comply with their licence. This is especially the case where the conditions prohibit either access to certain areas or associations with old friends.

Conclusion

Key messages about good practice in resettlement hold relevance for the young people who are the focus of this particular report. However, their implementation may require additional considerations for reasons of safety and wellbeing of young people and to ensure appropriate and effective engagement within the context of, for many, complex life histories. Most importantly, the secure estate needs to undertake appropriate screening of gang-involved young people in order to ensure that the necessary support is available to inmates as part of its prison violence and self-harm reduction strategy as well as aiding the resettlement process.

During the period of this investigation, the research team has discovered some excellent resettlement practice for meeting the needs of gang-involved young people. However, the tensions and challenges within the criminal justice system and particularly within the secure estate often render these initiatives less effective than they have the potential to be. Recognising the difficulties identified from this research, organisations might usefully consider the development of a comprehensive gang intervention programme as described in this report on page 43.

BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

While there is an extensive literature on the rehabilitation of young people in general and a smaller, but substantial, literature on the onset of, and involvement in, gangs, gang crime, and serious youth violence, there remains a paucity of material on desistance from gang crime, the rehabilitation of gang-involved young people and, in particular, how their period of incarceration and return from custody might best be managed. In this report we endeavour to synthesise what is known and to draw inferences from both the literature and key 'informants' working in these fields to fill out this picture and tease out the implications for resettlement policy and practice.

There are several key messages about good practice in resettlement that have already been identified through the work of BYC.

- 1** Resettlement is a process which should start at the point of sentencing and not be seen as a one-off event at the point of release from custody. This process should involve the young person making shifts in their identity, facilitating a move away from crime and towards desistance.
- 2** There should be a seamless transition back to the community with consistency of professional support and plans about housing and education/employment arrangements known prior to release.
- 3** Wrap-around support which acknowledges and pays attention to the trauma that many young people in the system may have had, or may still be experiencing, is needed. This should also include the provision of appropriate mental health and substance misuse services. Ensuring availability of the range of required services implies effective partnership and brokerage.
- 4** Children and young people require enhanced support around the point of release, which provides a 'window of opportunity' for change but can also be experienced as traumatic.
- 5** Engagement and high-quality relationships between staff and young people are at the heart of the resettlement process (Bateman et al, 2013).

Whilst these general elements of good practice do of course hold relevance for the young people who are the focus of this particular report, their implementation may require additional considerations for reasons of safety and wellbeing or indeed be more nuanced in their design and delivery to ensure appropriate and effective engagement with these groups which result in successful resettlement within the context of the additional complexities and for some, difficult life histories.

'The gang': a contested concept

In May 2012, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) reported that they had identified over 250 violent gangs and around 4000 'gang nominals' (identified gang members) in 19 gang-affected London boroughs. The national figure is thought to be several times this number. These gangs, the MPS suggests, range from organised criminal networks involved in Class A drug dealing and firearms supply, to street gangs perpetrating violence and robbery. These gangs are thought to be responsible for 22% of the serious violence in the capital, 17% of the robberies, 50% of the shootings and 14% of rapes (Metropolitan Police Service, 2012).

However, while, in 'gang-affected' neighbourhoods, police officers, professionals, adults, children and young people appear to believe that violent youth gangs exist (Pitts, 2008 and 2014), some academics remain sceptical. They argue that the stylistic differences between contemporary youth cultures and those of the past notwithstanding, the contemporary furor surrounding violent youth gangs is akin to the 'moral panics' which attended the teddy boys in the 1950s, the mods and rockers in the 1960s, the punks in the 1970s, the lager louts in the 1980s and so on. They contend that these periodic expressions of popular outrage tell us more about the anxieties of an adult public, 'opinion formers' and the media than the behaviour of young people. For them, the most important task

is to allay popular anxieties by pointing to historical continuities between contemporary youth cultures and those of yesteryear (Aldridge et al, 2008; Hallsworth and Young, 2008; Youth Justice Board, 2007).

In this critique, criminal justice agencies are seen to dramatise a problem and stoke popular anxieties in order to gain increased resources and greater political influence (Aldridge et al, 2008; Becker, 1966). Other academics believe that this demonisation has a more sinister purpose, arguing that current concerns about violent youth gangs are orchestrated by the state, its agencies and the media in order to justify ever deeper incursions into our freedoms and ever greater control over our lives (Hallsworth and Young, 2008; Muncie and Hughes, 2002; Rose, 1996; Simon, 2001).

Academics associated with the Eurogang Project (University of Missouri-St Louis, 2015) hold that youth gangs exist throughout the UK but, unlike popular North American portrayals, they have a fluid membership, porous boundaries and are, for the most part, engaged in only relatively innocuous adolescent offending (Aldridge et al, 2008; Klein, 2008). For them, the academic task consists of demolishing unhelpful stereotypes (Aldridge et al, 2008) and identifying those personal, familial and environmental characteristics of gang-involved young people which set them apart from others, in order to develop targeted intervention programmes.

It is true that historical continuities exist between youth subcultures past and present and the, sometimes misplaced, social anxieties they engender (Pearson, 1983), and it is also true that there are many adolescent groups in the UK, characterised by fluid membership and porous boundaries, engaged in relatively innocuous adolescent misbehaviour that are identified as 'gangs' (Klein, 2007). And, of course, it is the case that the term 'gang' is used indiscriminately in popular discourse, the media and the criminal justice system and that, all too often, its use is stigmatising and racist (cf Alexander, 2008). While the media should be far more circumspect in its use of the word 'gang', we nonetheless need a term which describes these groupings.

Defining the gang

Young people suspected of gang involvement are described variously, and often interchangeably, by the media, criminal justice and welfare professionals as: 'gang members', 'gang associates', 'gang affiliates', 'gang involved' and 'wannabees'. More importantly, from a practitioner's perspective, consideration of how the adoption of one particular definition may impact upon policy and practice and therefore the subsequent professional intervention, is useful.

Hallsworth and Young (2008) offer a definition of the gang which distinguishes it from the peer group on the one hand and the criminal business organisation on the other.

Hallsworth and Young's Three Point Typology of Urban Collectivities

The Peer Group: A small, unorganised, transient grouping occupying the same space with a common history. Crime is not integral to their self-definition.

The Gang: A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is integral to the group's identity.

The Organised Criminal Group: Members are professionally involved in crime for personal gain operating almost exclusively in the 'grey' or illegal marketplace.

Gordon (2000) offers a more nuanced differentiation between ostensibly similar youth groupings, all of which are sometimes colloquially described as gangs. What Gordon's, Vancouver-based, work also suggests is that definitions may have to be specific to particular cities, areas or neighbourhoods if they are to be useful.

Gordon's Five Point Typology of Youth Groupings

Youth movements: Social movements characterised by a distinctive mode of dress or other bodily adornments, a leisure-time preference, and other distinguishing features (e.g. punk rockers).

Youth groups: Comprising small clusters of young people who hang out together in public places such as shopping centres.

Criminal groups: Small clusters of friends who band together, usually for a short period of time, to commit crime primarily for financial gain and may contain young and not so young adults as well.

Wannabe groups: Young people who band together in a loosely structured group primarily to engage in spontaneous social activity and exciting, impulsive, criminal activity including collective violence against other groups of youths. Wannabees will often claim 'gang' territory and adopt 'gang-style' identifying markers of some kind.

Street gangs: Groups of young people and young adults who band together to form a semi-structured organisation, the primary purpose of which is to engage in planned and profitable criminal behaviour or organised violence against rival street gangs. They tend to be less visible but more permanent than other groups.

Criminal business organisations: Groups that exhibit a formal structure and a high degree of sophistication. They are composed mainly of adults and engage in criminal activity primarily for economic reasons and almost invariably maintain a low profile. Thus while they may have a name, they are rarely visible.

In 2008, Pitts, on the basis of research conducted in three London boroughs, devised the following definition of a street gang:

A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who (1) see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, (2) engage in a range of criminal activities and violence, (3) identify with or lay claim over territory, (4) have some form of identifying structural feature, and (5) are in conflict with other, similar, gangs.

Pitts, 2008

In 2012 the MPS adapted this definition, in an attempt to differentiate the gang from peer groups and criminal networks, to the more cumbersome:

A group of people who spend time in public places that

- see themselves (and are seen by others) as a noticeable group, and
- engage in a range of criminal activity and violence.
- They may also have any or all of the following features
 - identify with or lay a claim over territory,
 - are in conflict with other, similar gangs.

However, if the majority of offending is of a lower non-violent level then they would be considered a peer group not a gang.

A criminal network (which is different to a gang) is:

A group of individuals involved in persistent criminality for some form of personal gain (this includes profit and/or to gain or demonstrate status) which is causing significant harm to the community

- a group that keeps breaking the law to make money
- this law-breaking is causing harm to the community
- or, this law-breaking is a problem internationally (e.g. people trafficking)
- violence is used in order to make money (e.g. to scare people into giving them money)
- they are running an illegal business (e.g. drug trafficking)

This is the definition currently used by law enforcement agencies in England and Wales.

The taxonomy below (Pitts, 2014) endeavours to describe the different ways in which young people may be involved with a gang.

A Taxonomy of Descriptors of Gang Involvement	
Gang Associated	Interacting socially with gang members by dint of propinquity, shared hobbies or pastimes, friendships or familial links (not necessarily illegal).
Gang Involved I	Not being a constituent member of a gang or group or necessarily subscribing to its norms and values but intermittently co-opted to participate in some of its illegal activities, sometimes known as Tinies or Gofers.
Gang Involved II	Not being a constituent member of a gang or group or necessarily subscribing to its norms and values but coerced into undertaking illegal activities on its behalf.
Wannabees	Aspirants, who while subscribing to the gang's norms and values and adopting its dress code, signs and symbols, have not been accepted into the gang and are not involved in its illegal activities.
Gang Affiliated	A constituent, lower status, member of a gang or group; subscribing to its norms and values and participating, as a 'foot soldier', sometimes known as a Younger, in its illegal activities.
Gang Member	Core members with high status in a gang or group, subscribing to its norms and values and orchestrating, although not necessarily participating in, its illegal activities, sometimes known as Elders or Olders.

For the purposes of this report we have used 'gang involved' to describe those whose resettlement needs we are describing. That is, however, not to exclude the potential of young people to move across and between these categories at various times in their engagement with their peers and the criminal justice system. Where we have needed to differentiate a young person's activity from this understanding we have made this clear in the relevant section. We must also acknowledge that many young people do not recognise these descriptions as applying to their own experience of being involved in gangs.

” It was just people that I know...people that I've seen round my area for years...and then you start hanging out when you get a bit older...Then you become close...'if you've got one pound, I've got one pound'...that was the relationship.

19-year-old female

Ending gang and youth violence: the English gang strategy

The *Ending Gang and Youth Violence* (EGYV) report (Ministry of Justice, 2011) published in November 2011, was the government's response to the riots in the August of that year. It was based, in part, upon the deliberations of a rapidly convened International Forum on Gangs chaired by Theresa May and Iain Duncan Smith, which concluded, erroneously as it later transpired, that the riots had been fermented by youth gangs whose members were drawn from dysfunctional families. The report provided the blueprint for the government's national gang strategy which targeted 33 gang 'hot spots' in England (a further ten were added in 2014). The programme ran in parallel with a new *Troubled Families* Team, headed by Louise Casey, the government's 'erstwhile Anti-Social Behaviour Tsar'. She was charged with 'turning around' the 120,000 troubled families believed to be responsible for the bulk of antisocial behaviour, youth violence and gang crime in England and Wales. The two-year programme was launched in January 2012.

In most of these gang-affected areas the interventions took the form of projects which targeted the families of gang-involved young people and/or programmes that aimed to change the attitudes or enhance the employability or the mental health of actual or potential 'gang members'. However, the EGYV programme was launched at a time of severe cuts to youth services and its resources were distributed largely on the basis of the recipients' own estimation of whether or not their existing interventions were 'working'. As a result, on the ground, EGYV-funded provision tended to be determined as much by local professional and political interests as objective assessments of the nature and dimension of the local gang problem.

Further research focusing on recent changes in gang-related activities across EGYV areas (Disley and Little, 2015) found considerable variation in estimates of the size and nature of the gang problem by practitioners both within and between areas. This was partly because practitioners from different agencies were using somewhat different definitions of 'gang' but also because they were working with different aspects of the gang problem and different client groups. Moreover, because no systematic baseline measures of gang involvement and gang activity were put in place at the inception of the EGYV programme, and because some of the multi-agency partnerships established to oversee the programme were not sufficiently 'joined-up', it has been difficult for practitioners to assess the impact of their interventions. As a result, it remains unclear whether more young people are becoming involved in gangs, whether gangs are becoming more or less numerous and whether gang crime is becoming more or less serious.

Most respondents agreed that the defining features of gangs were involvement in drugs markets, violence and territoriality. While they thought nationality and ethnicity were less significant, they noted that in many gangs, members were drawn from a single ethnic or national group and commonly involved members of the same family.

The research involved interviews with 30 'current or ex-gang members' and they and the 15 'key informants' interviewed suggested that 'gang membership' was highly fluid and that gang-affiliates may:

shift their allegiances between gangs and that gangs can take on a more solid form at a certain point in time and split into new groups and sub-groups.

Practitioners who were surveyed suggested that girls and young women were involved in gang-related crime; storing drugs or firearms, or setting up attacks on rival gang members, but they were also aware of the violent and sexual exploitation of gang-associated girls and women, probably as a result of recent research in this area (cf Beckett et al, 2013).

Retaliation and drug dealing were believed to be the most common reasons for conflict between gangs, sometimes leading 'to cycles of violence spanning years' and gang-related disputes in custody were believed to ferment conflict in the community. Many respondents said that gangs were less visible now than two years ago; spending less time on the street in order to avoid the attentions of the police, and this may be an effect of the targeted policing of gangs of the type developed by the Trident Gang Crime Command, established in London in 2012.

Most respondents identified between three and eight gangs in their area although, confusingly, different practitioners from the same area reported different numbers. Most believed there were more than 100 gang members in their area usually aged between 15 and 24. Many believed that the ages of gang members had risen over the period but that the numbers of gangs had decreased, suggesting that outside London the EGYV intervention was having an impact. However, a minority thought that more children under 11 were gang involved compared with two years ago, echoing the findings of Harding's study of gangs in central Lambeth (2014).

Most London respondents, by contrast, believed that the number of gangs had increased in the preceding two years, that they had more affiliates and that a higher proportion of them were 'older' (in Lambeth, for example, over 50% of the 'nominals' on the borough's gangs matrix are over 18 with many in their 20s and 30s). Whereas the use of firearms appeared to have decreased outside the capital, this was not the case in London.

Many respondents felt that gangs were becoming better organised while some had become *de facto* criminal business organisations dealing drugs into markets throughout the country. This meant that previously antagonistic gangs were more likely to cooperate than was the case two years earlier. Particular concern was expressed about school-age children being used as 'mules' to convey the drugs to the points of sale.

When asked to describe the main changes they had observed vis-à-vis gangs over the preceding two years, the majority of practitioners expressed the following views:

- In some areas, particularly London, gangs were becoming better organised and had closer links into organised crime groups.
- That, partly as a result of this, gangs had a diminished street presence and lower visibility.
- In other areas, mainly outside London, gangs were becoming less structured and more fragmented.
- There was growing involvement of younger children and the exploitation of girls and young women was becoming more frequent, although the reasons for this perceived increase remains unknown.

Custodial trends

The policy context in which children and young people are incarcerated and resettlement occurs is a rapidly changing one (for further detail see Bateman et al, 2013; Bateman and Hazel, 2014a, 2014b and 2014c). Most significantly for current purposes, the youth custodial population has fallen sharply in recent years with the decline being particularly sharp for those aged under 18 (Bateman and Hazel, 2014c). As a consequence, the group that continues to be imprisoned is likely to have a more serious offending profile and to display more complex needs. For instance, in 2013/14, 23% of boys in YOIs reported having an emotional or mental health problem, an increase of four percentage points compared to the previous year (Prime, 2014).

The changing nature of the custodial cohort poses growing challenges for those working in the secure estate and resettlement providers. As a consequence, young people are more likely to experience physical restraint and segregation while in custody, limiting their access to constructive activities likely to promote successful resettlement (Prime, 2014). In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that the imprisonment of gang-involved young people is a growing concern. In 2013/14, for instance, 16% of boys in YOIs reported having experienced 'gang problems' when they first arrived at the establishment (rising to 21% for BME young people). A recent inspection of Feltham 'A' YOI (which holds boys aged under 18) noted that 48 gangs were represented in the establishment (HMIP, 2015) and the problem for the youth estate as a whole was described as 'seemingly intractable' by the Chief Inspector of Prisons (HMIP, 2015).

This issue is acknowledged as of increasing relevance by the custodial estate and almost half of boys surveyed in YOIs reported being asked whether they needed help or support with gang-related

difficulties (Prime, 2014). An inspection report of Feltham 'B' YOI (which accommodates young adult males) credited the establishment with having:

An appropriate focus on the challenges presented by gang affiliation...security information was shared widely and links with the police were good.

HMIP, 2015

The Youth Justice Board has confirmed that it is in negotiations over the possibility of seconding police officers to Feltham 'A' to help deal with the levels of violence after the apparent success of a similar pilot for young adults in HMP and YOI ISIS (Setty et al, 2014).

The falls in youth imprisonment have generated reduced need for custodial capacity leading to significant reconfigurations of the penal estate and the closure of a considerable number of institutions. The Youth Justice Board, for instance, recorded that it had decommissioned 905 custodial places for children during 2013/14. It has subsequently been confirmed that Hindley YOI and Hassockfield Secure Training Centre which together account for a further 306 places will close in 2015. Provision for 18-21 year olds would appear to be increasingly piecemeal, with this age group detained in a wide range of institutions, including YOIs that hold young people aged under 21, adult prisons where young adults are held in separate young adult wings and institutions where all prisoners over the age of 18 are totally integrated (Bateman and Hazel, 2014c). There are now 53 dual-designated custodial establishments that are permitted to hold young adults and adults within the same facility (Prison Reform Trust, 2014).

This increasing diversity of provision has been accompanied by a reduction in the number of frontline prison officers. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons has argued that:

It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the conjunction of resource, population and policy pressures, particularly in the second half of 2013-14 and particularly in adult male prisons, was a very significant factor in the rapid deterioration in safety and other outcomes we found as the year progressed.

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014

From the perspective of resettlement of gang-involved young people, these developments present particular difficulties. Depending on age and location, gang-involved young people may be concentrated in particular establishments, leading to a potential reinforcement of gang identity, and pressure on previously unaffiliated young people to align themselves with particular groups to enhance their own safety, 'resulting in a constant juggling to keep boys apart' (HMIP, 2015).

Other young people, however, may be widely dispersed, and placed at considerable distance from home, generating the prospect that gang activity might be 'exported' to institutions located away from areas that have traditionally been associated with gang problems.

In recent years, government policy has focused increasingly on resettlement, in recognition of the fact that reoffending following release from custody is consistently high for all age groups and for young people in particular (Bateman, Hazel and Wright, 2013). The *Transforming Rehabilitation* agenda (Ministry of Justice, 2013) has significant implications for the way in which resettlement services are delivered.

As part of the policy, the government has announced the establishment of a network of 70 resettlement (adult) prisons, each of which will be aligned to one of the 21 newly created Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) which replace probation trusts. CRCs have statutory responsibility for the supervision, rehabilitation and resettlement of all offenders assessed as being low or medium risk and, in the resettlement context, are responsible for the provision of services within resettlement prisons and post release in the community, ensuring a degree of consistency and allowing a 'through the gate' response. The intention is that most adults (including all women) will be transferred to a resettlement prison

towards the end of their sentence in the area where they will be released (Ministry of Justice, 2013). The implications of the development of resettlement prisons for young adult males aged 18-21, who are accommodated separately from older prisoners, are currently unclear as the government is reviewing custodial provision for this age group (Bateman and Hazel, 2014a). Moreover, the provisions do not apply to children below the age of 18 who are detained in a discrete secure estate.

Another element of the *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme relates to the circumstances under which short-term prisoners are subject to statutory supervision on release. Section 2 of the *Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014*, implemented on 1 February 2015, is designed to ensure that all prisoners aged 18 or over should be subject to a minimum of one year post-custodial licence or supervision. The amendments will not alter the period served in custody but will, in many cases, increase the period during which young people are required to comply with resettlement services once they are released. The provisions are relatively complex since the statutory supervision on leaving custody to which young people are subject depends on their age and the nature of the sentence imposed. As a consequence, the changes affect different young people in different ways, depending upon the existing arrangements. The table below details these changes.

Who	Sentence length	Prior to changes	After changes
Adult prisoners aged 18 or over	Two years or longer	Released at midpoint of sentence, subject to licence conditions until end of sentence	
Adult prisoners aged 21 or over	Between 12 months and two years	Released at midpoint of sentence, subject to licence conditions until end of sentence	Subject to an additional period of statutory supervision that begins at end of sentence and ends 12 months after release from prison
	Less than 12 months	Released at midpoint of sentence unconditionally with no licence conditions or statutory supervision	Subject to licence conditions until end of sentence, subject to an additional period of statutory supervision that ends 12 months after release from prison
Adult prisoners aged 18-20		Released at midpoint of sentence, subject to licence conditions for three months	
Children	Between four months and two years	Released at midpoint of detention and training order. Half is served in a secure estate and half in the community	If they turn 18 during their time in custody they will be subject to a period of statutory supervision for 12 months after release from prison

In England and Wales, the reasons for the substantial over-representation of black young people in YOIs have been hotly debated for several decades (Pitts, 1988). An analysis conducted by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) in 2012 found that, for comparable offences, black and Asian defendants were almost 20% more likely to be sent to jail than their white counterparts. Moreover, the average prison sentence for black defendants was seven months longer than for whites (Ministry of Justice, 2012).

Although the number of children in custody has fallen sharply in recent years and the number of young adults has also reduced, albeit rather more slowly (Bateman and Hazel, 2014c), the proportion of the incarcerated population from a minority ethnic background has been rising steadily. By April 2014 BME representation in the institutions which comprise the secure estate for children and young people had reached 39% (Bateman, 2014; Youth Justice Board/Ministry of Justice, 2014).

Much attention has been focused on the disproportionate numbers of black and/or Muslim men within the criminal justice system. Williams (2015) notes that the representatives of community organisations he researched feel that the policing of gangs tends to focus disproportionately upon BME young people, and this may be one of the reasons for their over-representation within the criminal justice system.

As the Young Review (Mullen, 2014) notes, black and/or Muslim offenders who have been imprisoned have poorer post-release outcomes than their non-Muslim and non-white counterparts. These facts create significant challenges for professionals supporting young men from these communities. As Mullen observes:

The position of young black and Muslim men in society is amplified by their experiences of actual and perceived discrimination in prison, which then impact upon their self-image and the process of achieving desistance. On release the continued inequalities they face in wider society and the deprivation which exists in many of the communities they return to further compounds this.

Mullen, 2014

With funding for the social intervention element of the EGYV programme running out and a renewed focus on improving practice in the areas of enhanced prosecution and joint enterprise, this disproportionality could continue to grow.

” My brother two years ago was a...he brought a bag which had a gun in it to someone and that gun, he wasn't actually at the crime when the gun was used, the gun was used to kill someone in broad daylight, and a guy lost his life because of my brother's involvement, OK. Joint enterprise is knowledge, presence, actions, any one of those three they can charge you under the joint enterprise. My brother got charged with murder. First offence, 18 years.

Young man with a history of offending

Theoretical perspectives and methodology

This section outlines some key perspectives that have informed our thinking about and approach to the work and the methods and tools used in gathering the data.

1 Rehabilitation

As Ward and Maruna (2007) have observed, until recently the risk factor model of rehabilitation has been the prevalent mode of intervention with incarcerated offenders and those leaving custody (Feilzer et al, 2004; Gendreau, 1996; Kratcoski, 2004; Van Voorhis, Cullen and Applegate, 2004). The risk factor paradigm has tended to be applied, by default, to the resettlement of young people. However, Ward and Maruna argue that this model has serious limitations because of its underdeveloped theoretical base and its emphasis on risk management to the detriment of the development of a different self-perception and the promotion of personal agency on the part of the subject. They therefore commend a 'strengths-based' Good Lives Model (Ward, 2015) because, rather than focusing only on risks and needs, it concentrates on supporting the development of a new identity, enabling offenders to play an active role in the change process, while considering the extrinsic factors which enable individuals to desist from crime, and the resources they will need to do so. This echoes other research which indicates that desistance from future offending is most likely to occur if, on release, a young person's family situation is stable, they have somewhere decent to live, they

have fulfilling work yielding an adequate income, that any substance abuse problems are addressed and that they have access to social networks which offer non-criminal social, vocational and recreational opportunities (Shapland et al, 2012).

2 The social field of the gang

Its many strengths notwithstanding, like the risk factor-based interventions it criticises, the Good Lives Model (Ward, 2015) is concerned primarily with the attitudes, beliefs, anxieties and aspirations of individuals, and therefore fails to address, head on, the impact of gang affiliation on the motivation and capacity of individuals to desist from crime and assume an active role in the change process. This is because, for the incarcerated gang affiliate, many if not most of the risks they face, as well as the factors militating against desistance, are a property of the environment, context or 'social field' from which they have been forcibly removed by the process of imprisonment and to which they will almost certainly return.

The work of the French social scientist Pierre Bourdieu has been influential in recent gang scholarship (cf Hagedorn, 2008; Harding, 2014; Pitts, 2008; Wacquant, 2004). Bourdieu (1999) eschews individualising explanations of human deviance, arguing that because human behaviour is primarily the product of the social fields in which human beings are embedded, these social fields must be analysed independently of the characteristics of their inhabitants. Social fields, he argues, are shaped by the broad 'determining structures' of class, family and ethnicity, but their specific form is determined by the struggle between 'agents' antagonistically oriented to the same prizes or values. This struggle creates status hierarchies, 'pecking orders', in which each position in the hierarchy induces a set of motivations that are subjectively experienced as 'what should be done'. Thus, what Bourdieu calls the 'social fate' of individuals is sealed in large part by the role demands, which they experience as a chain of objective requirements placed upon them.

You learn it just by hanging around...You know what you are supposed to do and not supposed to do really. Just like what you are allowed to do at school. They don't even need to explain it.

Harding, 2014

If this is so, it would suggest that rehabilitative interventions with gang-involved young people should address the individual, the individual within the gang and the gang within its social field.

3 Early-onset youth violence

A substantial body of research identifies two quite different developmental trajectories for the emergence of youth violence, one characterized by the 'early onset' of violence and the other by 'late onset'. Children who commit their first serious violent act before puberty are generally described as the early-onset group, whereas young people who do not become violent until adolescence are placed in the late-onset group.

North American research indicates that between 20% and 45% of boys who are serious violent offenders by the age of 16 or 17 first manifested this penchant in childhood (D'Unger et al, 1998; Elliott et al, 1986; Huizinga et al, 1995; Nagin and Tremblay, 1999; Patterson and Yoerger, 1997; Stattin and Magnusson, 1996). A higher percentage, 45 to 69%, of girls who were serious violent offenders by the age of 16 or 17 were violent in childhood (Elliott et al, 1986; Huizinga et al, 1995). However, most violent young people only begin their violent behaviour during adolescence and many serious violent offenders cannot be identified in early childhood (Lipsey and Derzon, 1998; Loeber et al, 2003).

These are particularly pertinent findings for the development of interventions with violent youth gangs because they suggest two things. Firstly, as Wikstrom and Loeber (1997) found in the Pittsburgh Child Development Study, late-onset violence is likely to be situational, precipitated by the social circumstances

in which young people find themselves rather than a late flowering manifestation of an inherent individual characteristic. Secondly, as Hagedorn (1998), Pitts (2008), Short and Strodbeck (1974), Thornbury (1998) and Xiaoming et al (2002) have observed, gang participation is likely to promote the distinctive fears, beliefs, attitudes and criminal pathways which lead them, inexorably, towards violent crime.

4 Methodology

This report is based upon a review of the English language literature on the rehabilitation of gang-involved young people aged between 10 and 25. The information in the literature review is augmented by a purposive sampling strategy of policy and practitioner experts. The literature review deployed a range of key words and phrases including gangs, gangsters, gang crime, youth violence, delinquent youth groups, desistance, rehabilitation, re-entry, resettlement, throughcare, parole, probation and supervision. It has accessed scholarly literature, central and local government reports and policy documents, and the publications of relevant quangos, non-governmental organisations, think tanks, pressure groups, penal reform organisations and children's charities, as well as press reports and articles.

This strategy aims to gather data from identified experts who can facilitate access to the extensive social networks to which they are 'gatekeepers' and provide unique understandings of aspects of these social milieux, by dint of the roles they play or have played within it, and illuminate the meanings of behaviour that the researcher may not understand. As such, these experts extend the investigator's reach in situations where he or she has not, or cannot, be a direct observer.

The fieldwork was designed by the BYC team and was undertaken between October and December 2014. All activity was conducted within the relevant ethical approval frameworks and all necessary safeguards were in place. 27 professionals attended focus groups in the south-east and north-west of England. These groups gave the BYC team an opportunity to share findings from the literature review and identify the challenges faced by practitioners that could be explored further in interviews.

Semi-structured interviews with resettlement professionals and young people were conducted in six sites. The young people involved were either in custody or had served custodial sentences for gang-related offences. All necessary risk assessments were conducted to ensure the safety of those who agreed to speak to the research team. All those interviewed in the community were contacted via resettlement projects they were engaged with to ensure appropriate follow-up support was available if necessary. 19 young people aged between 16 and 25 were interviewed, three of whom were female. In addition, eight interviews were conducted with professionals responsible for resettlement programmes both in custody and the community. Where consent was given, interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The information gained was then used to augment the literature review. Additionally, individual and project case studies have been developed from the data gathered and are included in this report and on the BYC website.

GANGS INVOLVEMENT AND THE GANG-AFFECTED NEIGHBOURHOOD

Established neighbourhood gangs tend to recruit from the younger siblings of gang members and their associates. While some young people embrace and revel in gang involvement, others are either ambivalent or resigned to it, seeing few, if any, realistic alternatives (Pitts, 2008). Indeed, the earliest US gang studies by Frederick Thrasher (1927) found that gangs were brought together, and held together, by fear of the threat posed by gangs from other neighbourhoods. And, 70 years on, Decker and Van Winkle (1996) describe how threats from the neighbourhood gang, and rival gangs, serve to consolidate gang affiliation.

The evidence from most UK and North American studies shows that young people living in gang-affected neighbourhoods are likely to know, to have grown up alongside, to have attended the same schools and to associate with young people affiliated with local gangs (Andell and Pitts, 2013; Beckett et al, 2013; Centre for Social Justice, 2009; Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Hagedorn, 1998 and 2008; Harding, 2014; Klein, 2008; Pitts, 2008; Youth Justice Board, 2007).

This close association between 'gang affiliates' and other young people in gang-affected neighbourhoods inevitably creates difficulties for researchers, welfare professionals, the police and prosecutors; partly because gang involvement can be fluid and sporadic, but also because distinguishing between young people who associate with 'gang members' and those who are 'gang affiliated' and engage in gang-related crime is no easy task.

In London, 'gang nominals', as the police describe those they suspect of gang involvement, are placed on a borough-specific gangs matrix. Inclusion on the matrix is based upon arrest and conviction data and corroborated and uncorroborated intelligence, as well as material from social networking sites such as YouTube, CCTV footage and telephone traces. However, as the police acknowledge, identifying 'gang nominals' is not a precise science because the matrix captures both active gang members and their non-offending associates and siblings who are on the system by dint of their proximity to, and frequency of association with, gang members rather than crimes they have perpetrated (Andell and Pitts, 2013; Pitts, 2014).

This research, and the experience of professionals working in this area, suggest that, from time to time, young people in gang-affected neighbourhoods who are unaffiliated with the gangs may be pressurised to undertake illegal acts, such as holding or transporting illicit drugs and hiding weapons or the proceeds of drug sales (Beckett et al, 2013; Fraser and Atkinson, 2014; Pitts, 2008).

Gangs and ethnicity

Although the available data points to a significant over-representation of black and mixed heritage young people in youth gangs in London, it is also the case that white and Asian young people sharing a similar social and economic profile and living in the same neighbourhoods are more likely to become involved (Pitts, 2008). This suggests that the impetus towards gang membership is ultimately determined by the spatial location and social predicament of gang members rather than their race or ethnicity per se (Flynn, 2010; Pitts, 2008; Short, 1997). This said, murders of young people are disproportionately high in London's black community (Fitzgerald, 2009).

In his study of the concentration and distribution patterns of homicides in London between 2000 and 2010, Mark Jackson (2010) found that of the 2,382 people accused of homicide offences, 92.7% were males. Of those accused of homicide, 829 were white European, 1,041 were African Caribbean and 304 Asian. 746 of the victims were white European, 566 were African Caribbean and 222 Asian. African Caribbean males accounted for 32% of all victims but the most heavily victimised sub-groups were African-Caribbean males aged 15 to 19.

The gang-affected neighbourhood

Gang-affected neighbourhoods are characterised by high levels of youth crime and victimisation, low family incomes, high levels of unemployment, dependency on means-tested benefits and low levels of educational attainment. In these neighbourhoods, gang-involved children, young people and adults are highly visible and seldom attempt to hide their affiliation. While most of the residents in these neighbourhoods are not involved with gangs, their lives are affected by them. Respondents interviewed in Waltham Forest by Pitts (2008) and in Lambeth by Andell and Pitts (2013) spoke of gangs routinely intimidating local residents and ‘terrorising’ local young people.

Many families in these neighbourhoods want to move home, but the paucity of available social housing makes this difficult. Some keep their children indoors during the week and take them to play or socialise with children outside the area at the weekend. In some families the children or young people’s gang involvement has precipitated a rift in the family, meaning that they can no longer live at home (Harding, 2014; Pitts, 2008). Some families inform the ‘authorities’; the police, the school or the local authority social care department about their problems, but say that these agencies can seldom offer sufficient help or protection. Others would like to involve the authorities but are constrained by fear or family loyalty from doing so. Some feel powerless and collapse into apathy or depression. Others simply mistrust the ‘authorities’. Others are aware of their child’s involvement but conclude that being accepted into the gang is the safest option for them (Andell and Pitts, 2013; Pitts, 2008; Young et al, 2014).

It is also the case that some parents are themselves involved in intergenerational gang crime. A respondent spoke of ‘King Pin’ families in South London and families who are instigating and benefitting from the proceeds of gang activities (Andell and Pitts, 2013). A young man interviewed for this report told the researcher that the same judge had sent both him and his father to prison for different crimes on the same day.

Research by Fitzgibbon et al (2013) found that two thirds of the gang-involved young people were from families headed by a single parent. Most of these families suffered from one or more of the following problems: poverty, overcrowding, family separation, bereavement, mental illness, family conflict, domestic violence, imprisonment, alcohol and substance misuse. Many had experienced violence in the home and several reported having difficult relationships with their parents or carers. Some appeared to be drawn into gang involvement because of the prior involvement of an older sibling. This echoes other studies of pathways into gang involvement (BRAP, 2012; Pitts, 2008).

Young people and some parents bemoaned the absence of a strong father figure in the home and some practitioners felt that families facilitated gang membership because their children were often unsupervised, particularly when mothers were working long hours, and clear boundaries were not set by parents. They also suggested that some parents were ‘in denial’ while they believed that others actually recruited their children into gangs or benefitted from the proceeds of gang crime. It is not clear whether these somewhat clichéd perceptions were supported by any evidence and most of the young people did not share these views. In fact, as Aldridge et al (2009) found in Manchester, many young people appeared to lead a ‘double life’, hiding their gang involvement from their parents. Parents who knew about their child’s gang involvement and tried to intervene were rarely successful.

THE EFFECTS OF GANG INVOLVEMENT

” You will get a lot more fun out of life if you are not gang related, because you are always miserable. No one is really happy with you. Yeah. And you are always a victim. People say ‘Nah I am not a victim’. You are always a victim because you are standing there on your own, because you are not going to sell drugs with someone else, because then they are going to take your money. So you are on your own. You are a victim.

17-year-old male in custody.

Clearly, involvement in gangs, or association with gang members, increases a young person’s risk of violent victimisation, particularly if they are black. Research conducted in North America indicates that even short-term gang involvement can have deleterious long-term effects, including increased risk of victimisation, increased criminal involvement, truancy and school exclusion and diminished employment prospects.

Melde and Esbensen (2011) found that the onset of gang involvement tends to be associated with a sharp rise in a young person’s involvement in crime. Thornbury (1998) describes the gang as an ‘escalator’, taking young people to a new and more serious level of criminal involvement. Thus, while the ‘delinquent peer group’ may act as a vehicle or context for the commission of offences, the severity of which is shaped by the proclivities of individual perpetrators, the gang facilitates the shift to different, and far more serious, levels of crime and richer rewards (Gatti et al, 2005; Klein and Maxson, 2006). Thornberry et al (2003 and 2004) note that the longer an individual is involved in gangs, the more severe the effect becomes, and the greater the distance between the gang member and his or her conventional peers.

Moffitt (1993) describes this as a process of ‘knifing off’, as the gang member cuts ties with family, pro-social peers and school or college involvement in favour of participation in the, usually illicit, activities of the gang. Over time, gang-affiliated young people, particularly if their bonds to families and conventional institutions are tenuous, may develop a dependency upon the gang which will be reinforced by the threat posed by other gangs. It is these young people who are most likely to develop the distinctive beliefs and attitudes (Kennedy, 2007; Sampson and Lauritsen, 1994), behaviours (Pitts, 2008; Short and Strodbeck, 1974), mental health problems (Xiaoming et al, 2002), and crime patterns (Hagedorn, 1998; Thornbury, 1998) that set them apart.

Bowling and Philips (2006) argue that social and economic exclusion and the undeserved injustices experienced historically by members of the black community can generate frustration and rage amongst black young people which, Kennedy (2007) argues, help to promote norms and narratives supportive of gang violence. Short (1997) argues that, over time, these norms and narratives foster ‘alternative cognitive landscapes’ developing what is sometimes called a soldier mentality, characterised by a heightened sensitivity to threat and a constant preparedness for action (Sampson and Lauritson, 1994) if these young people come to believe that those around them may be endeavouring to ‘disrespect’ them. Short writes:

Out of concern for being disrespected, respect is easily violated. Because status problems are mixed with extreme resource limitations, people – especially young people – exaggerate the importance of symbols, often with life-threatening consequences...These consequences are exacerbated by the widespread belief that authorities view black life as cheap, hardly worth their attention. This view is reinforced when black-on-white crime receives more attention by authorities and by the media than does black-on-black crime. The result is that people feel thrown back on their own limited resources. They arm, take offence, and resist in ways that contribute to the cycle of violence.

In these circumstances, as Short (1997) has argued, wider cultural values become unviable and this, as Decker and Van Winkle (1997) have demonstrated, tends to isolate gang members from the social and cultural mainstream to the extent that they can only feel a semblance of safety within the neighbourhood gang.

Factors sustaining gang involvement

However, unlike adolescent peer groups, whose motto might be *all for one and one for all* (Dumas, 1844) the violent youth gang is an essentially exploitative entity riven by suspicion and rivalry (Beckett et al, 2013; Pitts, 2008). Their motto, coined originally by Sun Tzu, author of *On the Art of War* (400 BC) could be *keep your friends close but your enemies closer*. Thus, fear of outsiders and suspicion of insiders are the push factors which hold the gang together. But there are also 'pull' factors which reinforce gang involvement (Densley, 2013).

One is the perceived untouchability of the protagonists because, while most adult residents in gang-affected neighbourhoods are aware of gang-related crime and violence, most are unlikely to intervene or report it to the police for fear of reprisal; believing that the police and the courts are probably powerless to stop it (Beckett et al 2013; Harding, 2014).

The risks notwithstanding, gang involvement can be rewarding, offering inclusion, protection, 'respect', status and, sometimes, a great deal of money because for some, it can open up access to lucrative roles in illicit drug distribution and links into criminal business organisations (Densley, 2013).



When I was with a gang I felt the urge to make money, to sell drugs, to get all the females. 'Cause that's what you get. You're a hood celebrity, they call it. So when you get the urge to sell drugs that's when you go to areas like Bradford or out of town, you see. So I would go to Portsmouth and sell drugs there.

21-year-old male

In his three-year study in central Lambeth, Harding (2014) found that an appearance of fluidity and disorganisation masked a hierarchical structure with well-trodden career pathways to both respect and money. Typically, he writes, they have a hierarchical structure, comprising four age-related tiers, which offers an illegitimate opportunity structure for those with the nerve and the requisite skills to occupy these roles (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960):

- 1 **Tinies** (aged 10 to 13) (run-arounds/go fors)
- 2 **Youngers** (aged 13 to 16) (foot soldiers)
- 3 **Olders** (aged 16 to 21) (strategists)
- 4 **Elders** (aged approximately 22 to 30+) (middle market drug wholesalers)

Clearly then, the 'gang problem' is not simply a teenage phenomenon and around half of the 'gang nominals' identified by the MPS are over 18. A recent study by Coid et al (2013) surveyed 4,664 men aged 18 and over and found, that amongst other things, in Hackney, 8.6% of adult male respondents acknowledged some form of gang affiliation which means, the authors suggest, that one in five black men in the area are gang involved in some way.

For gang-involved young men, the gang also offers more or less unrestrained access to young women who believe their status and popularity will be enhanced if they have sex with gang members and others who will be unwilling to report the sexual offences committed against them for fear of reprisals (Beckett et al, 2013; Firmin, 2011).

Although fewer girls and young women are involved in gangs than boys and many of them are involved only relatively briefly (Smith, 2005), the damaging effects of gang involvement may stay with them for a long time. When compared to gang-involved young men, gang-involved girls and young women may have different levels of involvement, different motivations for involvement and may come from different social circumstances and backgrounds. As Firmin (2009) has observed:

Women who are involved in gangs can occupy a number of roles, including: perpetrators...victims...partners... (and) can be targeted by gangs. Women associated with rival gangs can also be targeted with violence (including rape); and associates: partners, sisters and mothers might be involved with hiding drugs and weapons, washing blood-covered clothing, etc. Even where they have no formal involvement, partners can serve to 'glamorise' gang members, and to put pressure on them to provide the material wealth associated with criminal behaviour.

However, in reality gang-involved girls and young women may be required to carry or conceal guns, drugs and money and also to sell drugs. If they are arrested, robbed by gang rivals, or otherwise fail, they can expect violent retribution. Research also indicates that gang-involved girls and young women are at constant risk of sexual violence and exploitation (Andell and Pitts, 2013; Beckett et al, 2013; Firmin, 2011). Whilst these studies have focused on the increased victimisation of girls and young women associated with gangs; there is little said about rehabilitation per se.

Recent studies of gang-associated sexual violence undertaken by Beckett et al (2013), Firmin (2009 and 2011) and Harding (2014) suggest seven, often overlapping, roles played by gang-involved women and girls:

- 1 Wifey:** girlfriends who occupy a high status by virtue of their relationship with a 'top boy' in the gang.
- 2 Out of Area Girlfriends:** who may be middle class and/or university students whom male gang members believe give them greater status, while the young women may enjoy this brief 'walk on the wild side' but are vulnerable to reprisal attacks by the enemies of their partners.
- 3 Links:** girls and young women aged as young as 12 who are expected to have individual and group sex with gang members.
- 4 Baby Mothers:** who will have borne a child to a male gang member, enjoy a certain level of protection unless they attempt to end the relationship.
- 5 Gangster Girls:** are engaged in the same illicit activities and violence as the young men and do not have sexual relationships with them.
- 6 Family Members:** mothers or sisters of male gang members, who do not necessarily have a role in the gang but may be vulnerable to reprisal attacks by the enemies of their partners, sons or brothers.
- 7 Set-up Girls/'chicks':** may be involved with high status members of several gangs, although they are not affiliated to any of them and may be paid or rewarded in some other way to lure members of rival gangs into ambushes.

” I was mixing with guys who, basically, sexually exploited me, and I would say they sexually exploited me not because they were having sex with me. I don't even mean that context, but they would use...it's almost like they know that you're innocent but you're not innocent. So they...they use that, and I used to hold drugs, guns, anything that they'd ask me to do for a bit of money I would do it.

24-year-old female released in 2014

The role a young woman occupies will have a link to the risk of victimisation she faces. Often a young woman will move between roles very quickly and suddenly find herself a target of violence. Studies of girls and young women who become involved with violent youth gangs conducted in North America suggest that many of those who become seriously involved, as distinct from those who are lightly engaged or just 'passing through', have been subject to parental neglect and may have suffered psychological, physical and sexual abuse at home, school or elsewhere (Miller, 2009). For these young women the gang appears to offer an alternative to, and possibly protection from, a difficult or abusive family situation and the promise of 'real' friendship, appreciation, popularity, excitement and money.

As the work of Beckett et al (2013) and Firmin (2011) suggests, for girls, joining the gang tends to be a process of 'seduction' rather than 'coercion', sometimes following in the footsteps of an older sister, or more often, an older brother, who is already a gang member; or starting a relationship with a gang-involved boy or young man. However, the protection cited as a reason for being involved with the gang is often misplaced as these young women believe that their gang-involved 'boyfriend' will look after them and remain loyal.

Within gangs they don't treat women as women. They're just objects...You've got to understand like girls, to males in gangs, are commodities. They're just like going and picking a pair of shoes off the shelf and putting them on...the girls are not that special to them, but they have to have 'em around. They're easy come, they're easy go. As quick as they found her, if they went, they'd find someone else.

Beckett et al, 2013

Whether gang involved or not, girls and young women living in gang-affected neighbourhoods are also at heightened risk of sexual victimisation. As a young woman from an estate near the Elephant and Castle area observed:

On my estate there are two kinds of girls, those who are involved with gangs and are sexually abused by male gang members and those who are not involved with gangs but are afraid that they could be sexually abused by male gang members.

Andell and Pitts, 2013

The normalisation of sexual violence and abuse

Some younger girls and young women appear not to recognise the seriousness of the sexual violence or exploitation to which they are subjected. Firmin (2009) writes of an incident in which a particularly attractive young woman was 'given' to a rival gang to settle a 'beef'. Far from feeling enslaved, this apparently made her feel 'tremendously important and powerful'.

Other girls and young women do recognise the seriousness of their sexual victimisation but will rarely report it because they believe that the 'authorities' are unable to keep them, or their families, safe from violent retribution.

Beckett et al (2013) found that only one in 12 young people felt that someone of their age would be likely to report, or talk about, experiences of sexual violence or exploitation. Where they did choose to tell someone about their experiences, this would most often be to a peer rather than anyone in a position of authority.

This is supported by the earlier study where Radford et al (2011) note that likelihood of reporting sexual violence decreases significantly if perpetrated with a peer, with 83% of those who experienced sexual violence from a peer not telling anyone, compared to 34% of those assaulted by an adult.

A recent report for Victim Support, conducted by the University of Bedfordshire (Beckett and Warrington, 2014), identified a number of inter-related influencing factors as to why young people do not report crime to the police, they are:

- 1 understanding of what constitutes crime and victimisation and how to report this
- 2 the context in which the crime or victimisation occurs
- 3 risks associated with reporting
- 4 perceptions of victimhood
- 5 perceptions and experiences of the police

As Beckett and Warrington (2014) identified, research studies have also evidenced the potential for serious physical risk in retaliation for 'grassing' or 'snitching'. This can include experiences of serious physical assault, rape or other sexual harm where a young person has reported to the authorities rather than adhere to the group norms of silence (Beckett et al, 2013; Firmin, 2011; Metropolitan Police Authority, 2008; Owen and Sweeting, 2007; Yates, 2006).

Unsurprisingly, such harm has been noted to affect not only the young person who broke the rules of engagement, but also their siblings or other family members. Indeed the fear of potential harm to others is often a more effective silencing mechanism for children and young people than threats to oneself (Beckett et al, 2013; Firmin, 2011; Metropolitan Police Authority, 2008). For gang-involved young women, the risks associated with reporting are extremely great:

Let me give you an example of why people don't [go to the police]. Because if you go to the police station and say 'this gang member raped me' that gang member might be found guilty and go to jail, but remember he's part of a gang. So all the ones in the gang, 500 people, 400 people, will come back to you, to your house. Could go to your family's house, you know. So you might as well keep it on the low and move on with your life innit...If you go to the police, that's the wrong move. That's the worst thing a person could do...It'll come back 'cause with gangsters they got to win innit. They never give up.

17-year-old female

Beckett et al, 2013

Sexting, social media and the gang

There has been much discussion around 'sexting' in recent years; in a Childline survey (2013) three out of five young people aged 13-18 said they had been asked to send a sexual image or video of themselves and two out of five had done so. 'Sexting' is fairly widespread amongst gang-involved young people, and while some young women are not necessarily aware that they are being filmed, some others who are, seem to have little understanding of its likely consequences. One in five child abuse images reported to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre in 2012 were self-generated images, but the vast majority of these (88%) had been taken from their original location and uploaded somewhere else (Jutte et al, 2014). This suggests how quickly young people can lose control over the distribution of their images.

Some professionals interviewed in Lambeth (Andell and Pitts, 2013) believed that a rise in the incidence of sexual harassment in schools, group sexual assaults and gang-associated sexual violence was a product of a misconception about how 'gangstas' should conduct their sexual relationships, because much of their information was gleaned from commercial media and 'porn sites'. Research suggests that this 'sexualisation' or 'pornogrification' of youth culture perpetuates the association between masculinity and predatory sexual prowess, thereby justifying sexual violence (Coy, 2009).

Sexual harassment and grooming in schools

Some police officers in South London said they believe that, like ‘sexting’, the low-level, but routine, sexual harassment of schoolgirls is a growing problem. Several suggested that the school was one of the main places where slightly older gang-involved young people, mainly boys but also some girls, ‘groomed’ younger, more naive and vulnerable girls, in order to involve them in sexual activity with gang-involved boys.

These young women are often identified and ‘groomed’ at school by gang affiliates using protestations of love and affection and promises of gifts. Sex is very important to gang members and the frequency with which and the numbers of girls with whom they are able to have sex are key components of their ‘street capital’ and the respect they enjoy (Harding, 2014).

Professionals suggest that the children most likely to be drawn into these insidious transactions are not necessarily abused or neglected, but come from homes where parents are under the greatest emotional and financial pressure, often working in several low-paid jobs to keep the family together, with little time to supervise their children’s leisure.

The vulnerability of gang-involved girls and young women to violence

Low status gang-involved girls and young women (‘links’, ‘skets’, ‘slags’) are particularly vulnerable because, whereas the young men have a strong sense of fatalism, tending to believe that they have no alternative but to be involved, they think that the young women have ‘chosen’ to put themselves into this risky situation voluntarily. In this way, these young women are both harmed and blamed for their predicament. As a result, male gang members tend to be indifferent to the risks that the young women face. Whereas gang-involved young men would protect and defend their mother or sister, they would not necessarily protect gang-involved girls and young women because most of these relationships tend to be fairly ‘casual’ and if something ‘bad’ happened to these girls, the young men would tend to think it was not their problem. Another group vulnerable to violent attack are the daughters of high status ‘first generation’ male gang members serving lengthy prison sentences. These high status young women may be the targets of vendettas against their fathers and therefore need to remain gang involved in order to receive their protection. Sisters of gang members are also targeted by rival gangs.

The sexual attitudes of gang-involved young men

Exploitative social and sexual relationships appear to be a defining characteristic of ‘street culture’, which is reinforced by the misogynistic lyrics of gangsta rap and the rapping and ‘spitting’ produced by gang-involved young men on YouTube and other social networking sites. This means that gang-involved young men are under continual pressure to demonstrate their sexual prowess and this can mean that they will sometimes engage in group sexual activity or assaults, ‘line-ups’, even if they do not want to, for fear of losing face and making themselves vulnerable to attack or rejection by their peers. Some male professionals involved with gangs appear to be unaware of the complexities of these encounters, sometimes assuming the young women are simply making ill-informed choices and that the young men are willing participants (Andell and Pitts, 2013).

In some gang-affected towns and cities in England, the last decade has witnessed a fragmentation of older-established gangs and the proliferation of younger, more anarchic ones. These new groupings appear to be less concerned with the acquisition of wealth and more concerned with building a reputation for extreme violence. This transition has paralleled, and been driven by, a process in which local gang traditions have been supplanted by a ‘bricolage’ of elements absorbed from a globalised gang culture mediated via film, the internet, music and computer games (Valkenburg and Peter, 2007; Weitzer and Kubrin, 2009). As such, this new, synthetic, ‘gangsta’ culture tends, necessarily, towards caricature and exaggeration (Hagedorn, 2008).

Demonstrations of hyper-masculinity (Young, 1999) through group sexual assault (Metropolitan Police Service, 2011) and gang-associated sexual violence (Beckett et al, 2013; Firmin, 2011) are central elements of this new synthetic/authentic, hyper-real, way of discharging the 'gangsta' role. This is compounded, some argue, by the tidal wave of readily accessible pornography available on the internet (Flood, 2009) and the capacity of individuals to generate home-grown versions of this via 'sexting' (Ringrose et al, 2012). This 'sexualisation' or 'pornogrification' of culture in general, and 'gangsta' culture in particular, perpetuates the association between masculinity and predatory sexual prowess which, as Coy (2009) observes, justifies sexual violence and exploitation.

Depends on what kind of name she has. If she has a name and someone tries to sleep with her and she won't let them, and they know that she's slept with loads of other people, they'll force her into it. They would rape her, if you class that as rape.

21-year-old male

Beckett et al, 2013

The MPS defines 'gang rape' (Group Sexual Assault, GSA) as 'a sex attack by three or more people'. A study by Scotland Yard's Operation Sapphire, which investigates sex crimes, revealed that in 2008/09, the MPS recorded 93 'gang rapes' compared with 36 in 2003/04. Moreover, the number of attacks involving four or more attackers appears to have grown over the period while the average age of victims fell. In 1998/99 48% of victims were under 19, whereas by 2008 this proportion had risen to 64%, and 36% were under 15. The proportion of white victims fell from 69% in 1998/99 to 50% in 2008. During the same period, the proportion of black victims rose from 17% to 34%. This rise has led the MPS to map the girls and women associated with 'gang nominals' in an attempt to provide advice and protection to those who may be deemed to be at risk. In 2008/09 42% of suspects were aged under 19 compared with 38% in 2003/04. 8% of them were identified as white, 32% as black and 24% as 'different ethnicities'. The ethnicity of the remaining 36% is unknown.

The issues for girls and young women who are gang involved echo many of the concerns and recommendations raised in the BYC research report on the resettlement of girls and young women (Bateman and Hazel, 2014d). Notwithstanding these similarities, it is crucial that providers of resettlement services are aware a young woman released from custody may have been coerced into committing the offence with which she was charged and may well have believed that had she not, she may have been the victim of sexual and physical violence. The trauma associated with her time in custody needs addressing upon release and possibly for a long while afterwards.

The principles informing these resettlement services emphasise that they should be strengths based rather than deficit based, culturally relevant and gender specific, particularly in dealing with sexual assault and abuse (Miller, 2009; Totten, 2009). Moreover, programmes should recognise variations in young women's ages and levels of gang involvement. Research also suggests that intervention strategies should be responsive to diversity of need and experience among female gang members, with a particular sensitivity to ethnic and cultural differences.



SHELLEY'S STORY

Shelley was committing crime from the age of 11, but got caught at 14. She was selling drugs for an older associate, and owed him 200 pounds. He threatened to shoot her if she failed to deliver his money. In order to find the money quickly, she stole mobile phones which could be sold on. Shelley was arrested and found herself the subject of electronic monitoring, 'on tag'.

I was young, dumb, hanging round with friends...I'm cool, I'm bigger than you...and then you get arrested and I'm, like, 'wait, hold on'...and then I stopped committing crimes.

Whilst under the youth offending team (YOT)'s supervision, Shelley didn't breach her tag and lived within the law for a couple of years. Then 'things started happening' to her. Her family life became volatile, her home was no longer a safe place, and she left. Now homeless and unable to return to her parents' house, Shelley had no income or security. She turned to the people she called friends for support. Together, they survived.

...when you have no food...and no one really wants to help you...what are you gonna do?...if you're not thinking correctly or if you're really, really desperate...I dunno how to explain it...'I don't know where I'm sleeping tonight'...it's, like, 'I'm so sorry, I have to eat'...to be honest, like, 'it's your phone, it's not the end of the world'.

After a year of making ends meet via crime, Shelley was arrested. At 17, she was placed into the care of social services. She was housed alone and miles away from home; the only place available. Shelley found the situation difficult to manage. People she then considered to be her friends were abusing her, and she had nowhere to turn.

...I tried to turn to social services, I didn't have any family...all I'm doing is committing crimes...'you owe money, go and commit some crimes'...I knew I was going to go to jail...there was a time before I went in, that I wanted to go to jail...it needed to happen, basically.

After robbing someone at knife point, Shelley found herself in prison just shy of her 18th birthday.

I'm sitting in jail...and then I was, like, 'you know what, this isn't me'...I needed to improve my life, and I needed to make a step forward.

Once released, Shelley was keen to make up for lost time. Despite feeling let down by service providers in the past, Shelley's case worker found her keen to engage: 'she wanted to turn her life around'.

Shelley recognises that she made bad choices, and is determined not to reoffend:

...sometimes you don't make the best choice, because you think it's your only choice...then you have to pay the price...that's what you have to do, and then you try and come out and better yourself, because you don't wanna go back there.

Shelley is waiting for social services to find her a home.

In his book *Deadly Symbiosis* (2004) Loic Wacquant writes:

Along with racial division, the predatory culture of the street, centred on hyper masculine notions of honour, toughness, and coolness has transformed the social structure and culture of jails and prisons. The “convict code”, rooted in solidarity among inmates and antagonism towards guards has been swamped by the “code of the street”, with its ardent imperative of individual “respect” secured through the militant display and demonstrated readiness to mete out physical violence. ...Today’s prison further resembles the ghetto for the simple reason that an overwhelming majority of its occupants originate from the racialized core of the country’s major cities, and return there upon release—only to be soon caught again in police dragnets and sent away forever—longer sojourns behind bars, in a self-perpetuating cycle of escalating socioeconomic marginality and legal incapacitation.

Wacquant is writing about developments in the USA which, he argues, have *prisonized the ghetto and ghettoized the prison*. This is an important observation because, if the gang-affected neighbourhood is locked into this type of *deadly symbiosis* with the prison or YOI, then any realistic resettlement programme must target both simultaneously. In this sense, gang resettlement work, like resettlement of young people with no gang affiliations, should be seen as a process that follows young people’s journeys through custody and back into the community.

Prison gangs

There is an important distinction to be drawn between street gang members in prisons and ‘prison gangs’. Whereas Klein and Maxson (2006) define the street gang as a *durable, street-oriented youth group[s] whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity*, Lyman (1989) defines the prison gang as:

An organization which operates within the prison system as a self-perpetuating criminally oriented entity, consisting of a select group of inmates who have established an organized chain of command and are governed by an established code of conduct.

Research on the existence of prison gangs in the UK penal system has hitherto been limited. However, research by Liebling et al (2011) in HMP Whitemoor suggests that groupings that correspond in some respects with Lyman’s definition of prison gangs may be operating in some UK jails. The researchers found that some prisoners were converting to Islam for protection or because they had been ‘bullied’. A number of non-Muslims and prison officers claimed that converts did so to join an ‘organised gang’ and a ‘protection racket’ which ‘glorified terrorist behaviour and exploited the fear related to it’. The report noted that:

The new population mix, including younger, more black and minority ethnic and mixed race, and high numbers of Muslim prisoners, was disrupting established hierarchies in the prison. Social relations among prisoners had become complex and less visible. Too much power flowed among some groups of prisoners, with some real risks of serious violence. There were high levels of fear in the prison. In particular, there were tensions and fears relating to ‘extremism’ and ‘radicalisation’.

Prison guards said that they operated a policy of ‘appeasement’ towards the powerful and growing Islamic population, particularly convicted terrorists, who were feared to be recruiting future extremists.

The rise in prison violence as described on page 13 of this report was paralleled by severe budget cuts at the MOJ which have led to staff cuts in penal establishments. An investigation of Feltham YOI by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP, 2015) found that nearly two gang-related attacks were recorded every day on the institution's CCTV. The investigation was triggered because the authorities had found that warders at Feltham 'B', the wing reserved for inmates aged 18 to 21, used batons significantly more than at any other prison. HMIP found that gang markings were daubed inside cells and prison officers were forced to move groups around in order to prevent disputes escalating. Nick Hardwick, the Chief Inspector of Prisons, described Feltham 'B' as a *very disturbing place...If you were a parent with a child in Feltham you would be right to be terrified. It would be very hard not to join a gang in Feltham.*

In March 2013 the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee (PPAC, 2013) indicated that the 2012 MOJ spending cuts had increased the level of risk in prisons, noting that:

We are concerned about safety and decency in some prisons and the fact that more prisoners are reporting that they do not feel safe. Assaults on staff, self-harm and escapes from contractor escorts have all increased. The agency should ensure that savings plans have regard to the potential impact on risks to standards of safety, decency and respect in prisons and in the community.

HMP and YOI Isis in Thamesmead, London, opened in April 2010. In January 2012, HMIP identified the quality of staffing and gang violence as the two major problems afflicting the prison. Later in 2012 the report of the Isis Independent Monitoring Board observed that:

Probably the most serious local issue facing the institution is the high level of violence and bullying, mainly gang-related, among offenders and the resulting fears for personal safety.

In February 2014, following a surprise visit, the Chief Inspector of Prisons expressed concern that many of these violent incidents were serious, often involving gangs, with a higher proportion than usual involving weapons (HMIP, 2014a). It was also noted that many of these assaults were planned and involved a number of inmates attacking a single prisoner. In August 2014, 105 of the 622 inmates, all of whom are under 25, were logged on the MPS gangs matrix, while others were 'self-declared' gang members.

An unannounced visit in June 2014 to HMYOI Cookham Wood in Kent, which holds sentenced and remanded boys aged 15 to 18, found a similar situation (HMIP, 2014b). In the six months before the inspection 169 acts of violence were recorded and the inspectors noted that *serious injuries following fights and assaults were not uncommon*. They watched more than a dozen videos of incidents which revealed weapons, attacks on individuals by multiple assailants and reckless behaviour by boys, including kicking and head stamping. They warned that the violence at Cookham Wood was *high and rising*.

Professionals who attended the focus groups said that the gang violence problem in prisons and YOIs is widespread and serious. Several are involved in the direct delivery of programmes within the institutions mentioned earlier. They believed that prison staff did not understand why people were fighting with each other and lacked the resources, in terms of the number and skills of prison officers, to deal effectively with violent incidents. There is therefore frequent recourse to 'lockdown' and punishment through the use of solitary confinement. This prevents many gang-involved young people gaining access to personal development programmes designed to tackle gang violence or attend educational opportunities on offer.

” Basically, when you’re from a gang, in custody, there’s no such thing as a gang. There’s gangs inside but there’s no such thing. Everyone’s together. They don’t care if you’re from that gang or that gang. They will mix you, so you tend to have fights. I used to have a lot of fights.

20-year-old male released in 2013

The psycho-social environment

Focus group respondents felt that custodial institutions were dehumanising environments for both staff and inmates. The problem, they said, resided in the culture of the institutions and the solution therefore lay in ‘cultural change’. There is, they said, insufficient support and supervision for poorly trained officers. As a result of the post-2010 cuts in the MOJ, many of the older and more experienced prison officers retired. Having recognised the problems caused by these staff reductions, the MOJ is hurriedly recruiting new staff, albeit on a lower rate which is unattractive to many of the experienced officers who were made redundant.

This raises questions about whether a strategy of concentrating gang-involved young people in particular prisons and YOIs makes sense. Most of the research suggests that prison violence tends to be ‘imported’ into jails by gang members (De Lisi et al, 2004) and that previously uninvolved young people may choose to become gang involved as a means of self-protection (Pitts, 2008). It is also suggested by some gang members that the proliferation and consolidation of gang-related drug-dealing networks is facilitated by throwing large numbers of gang-involved people into the same place with very little to do apart from fight and plan for a more lucrative future.

Controlling gangs in prisons

Given the high profile of the issue of gangs in prison it seems likely that the MOJ will adopt a new strategy involving enhanced prosecution and, possibly, the isolation and/or dispersal of gang-involved prisoners throughout the system. However, this raises further questions about whether, by moving seriously gang-involved young people to other wings or other institutions, one is solving the problem or sowing the seeds for the proliferation of the prison gang. This will depend on how widespread gangs or gang culture is within the penal system. However, this task will be made more difficult because of the recent and planned closures of some prisons and prison units. At present, we know very little about the dimensions of the ‘gang problem’ in UK penal institutions. To date, Jane Wood and her colleagues at the University of Kent are the only researchers to have conducted studies of the extent of gang activity in English prisons (Wood, 2006; Wood and Adler, 2001; Wood et al, 2009; Wood et al, 2010). Since 2001, they have interviewed staff in 16 prisons and 360 inmates in nine prisons about their knowledge of gangs, gang members and gang behaviours.

They found that gang activity was highest in medium security male institutions and that ethnicity was an important dimension of gang involvement, as were local and regional loyalties. Inmates spoke of increasing levels of gang-related activity and of the difficulties staff experienced in maintaining order. Many respondents expressed the belief that prisoners controlled events in the prison, particularly with regard to drug trafficking. Prisoners’ accounts echoed many of the observations made by prison staff. If this is so, it is necessary to consider the ways in which prison regimes might be organised to minimise gang crime and violence in order to maximise the prospects of effective rehabilitation.

Preventing prison violence and promoting rehabilitation

Until relatively recently, the two main academic approaches to prison violence were the *deprivation* and *importation models*. The former model suggests that the loss of freedom and the stark prison environment lead prisoners to create a deviant subculture that generates violence (Wortley, 2002). The latter model contends that prisoners, by dint of their personal and criminal histories and social networks, bring the violence with them (Cao, Zhao and van Dine, 1997; Harer and Steffensmeier, 1996).

More recently, scholars have turned their attention to the ‘minutiae of the average prison day’

(Bottoms, 2003) and how the organisation of the prison shapes the interactions between inmates and creates the situational factors that trigger or regulate violence. These can be characterised as the *transactional model* (Bottoms, 1999) and the *situational model* (Wortley, 2002). In these studies, factors identified as being linked with prison violence include prisoner characteristics, racial tensions, prison architecture and design, management practices, levels of security, staff skills and training, prison culture and political pressure on prison administrators. In sum, poor prison management resulting in dysfunctional forms of control emerges as a major cause of prison violence; suggesting that changes in these practices, especially the abandonment of arbitrary coercive controls, will be most effective in reducing violence. Research suggests that the most effective violence prevention strategies include improved surveillance of high-risk locations, the manipulation of prisoner privileges and improved supervision of both staff and prisoners.

The empirical evidence for the violence-reduction effects of treatment programmes, including cognitive-behavioural, violence alternatives, and anger management is not strong (e.g. Walrath, 2001) and most scholars conclude that their success is dependent upon conducive situational factors. Academic and vocational education programmes by contrast appear to help reduce prison rule violations and violence and therefore appear to be one of the more useful management approaches for maintaining prison order (Fritsch and Gerber, 1994).

Education in the prison

” I was a bit of a player, so have you heard of a player, I had different girls. So when I went into jail I had loads of people writing to me, I couldn't read them. I could read like one word and then miss a few words and read, so I had to get other people to read it for me, and I felt like an idiot. So I learnt and then I started reading, and then started writing and learning. That was the main thing and then I just wanted to...It come up that when I was in education, I wanted to go. I was thinking there's no point in just going because they are there, I might as well learn as well, and I just started learning. They come up with an agreement. Because when I first went I used to get into a lot of fights in there. So they come up...Where I was always down the block or always in my cell they come up with an agreement. They said they will let me do what I want to do, if we do their courses. So I used to do my Art and Mechanics any time I wanted.

22-year-old male

Whereas the research suggests that education can offer the inmate a route to success when they are eventually released, professionals who attended the focus groups observed that prisoners of widely different abilities and at very different stages of their educational careers were frequently put together in YOIs.

” Yeah, there's loads of qualifications but it's all entry level one, two, three, and all silly little stuff that doesn't really get recognised in the real world. So for me all those courses are a big joke and I was, like, nah, why am I wasting my time doing that when I've done higher level stuff? So when I saw the level three Advice and Guidance I was, like, wow, this is...this is good. Put in an application, got accepted, did the course, passed it, and then got offered a chance to go in the community and do some voluntary work. Perfect opportunity.

25-year-old male

It was also reported that much of the gang-related violence 'kicked off' during education classes. There appears to be a high level of undiagnosed learning disabilities and mental health needs within the population and the early use of screening tools could avoid many situations in which these problems exacerbate the violence. Additionally, it appears that there is no specialised training for teachers in penal institutions.

” So I used to think that there's literally a problem in me, so I used to cause fights at school instead of reading out loud, understand? I used to be destructive just to get out of that scenario, just to save myself from embarrassment. But in prison they actually found the source and they told me oh, you're dyslexic. I was, like, oh, OK. That's why I was like it.

21-year-old male

Focus group respondents also raised the issue that because of poor coordination inside the prison or YOI it can take two hours to bring a young person to their classroom. Additionally, due to the increase in violence within the institutions, behaviour management tends to be focused on confinement and isolation, inevitably reducing a young person's potential to participate in educational opportunities. Very little use is made of technology and one respondent observed that if the prison could be linked to the court by video it could also be linked to universities and further education colleges. However, this suggestion tends to be dismissed because of 'security issues'.

A concern was expressed that with the implementation of the new regime of 30 hours a week of education in YOIs, if no attempt is made to make it relevant and interesting for each of the inmates, it could increase the likelihood of violence, not least because it could mean that the young people are denied access to the gym and other sporting facilities. Provision of education is variable across the custodial estate as these contrasting quotes illustrate.

” There's not really much to offer, but I chose a trade. I chose painting and decorating. To be honest, the courses should be longer, but obviously, there's a lot of students and people to cater for. But I chose painting and decorating, and I done my best in prison to gain the relevant qualifications to actually gain employment when I come out. And I got a job in painting and decorating. I believe...three months after I was released from custody, and I motivated a lot of people, because a lot of people who I left behind, in colleges or in gangs or whatever, they were, like, oh, I need to get a job. And I just told 'em I got a job already.

24-year-old male

” You have got your workshops downstairs and you have got the education upstairs, and there's this big. It goes all the way down, it is long, like big corridors. So you have got everything. You have got Art, you have got PSB, you have got erm...ICT, Music, English, Maths, Science, Catering...you have got loads. So it is up to you. You can choose as well, you can choose what you want to do. But it helps a lot, there's loads of people in there that...There's people in there that I, you know, can't read and write like how I was, and they are learning. It is good in there. It is up to you what to do, if you set your mind to it. If not then you just sit in your cell and do your time and that.

21-year-old male

Of significant importance for young people leaving custody were the arrangements put in place to continue with their education. Arrangements for suitable placements in schools or colleges were often made extremely late, or indeed, in the case below, not at all.

” We've just had a girl come out of custody, and again, pre 16, there was no school placement set up for her. We are now halfway through the new start of term, and she is not going to get a place now until after January, she leaves school in June, so we have already lost three months of the year. Because nothing, not enough planning was put in place. So she is not getting an education. Now they are finding these stupid, I am going to say stupid, three-day courses that mean nothing, she is wasting her time. She is not going to walk away with a qualification. Whatever job she applies for, whatever apprenticeship she applies for, you are going to need your...well GCSEs preferably, but you are going to need your basic numeracy. And the issue with that is, the longer you leave it, the more daunting it becomes for that young person.

YOS professional



LISA'S STORY

The use of ROTL could be expanded further to ensure that inmates get the chance to attend relevant educational or volunteering opportunities and interviews. This example demonstrates the importance of the relationship between inmates and prison staff in making decisions about the suitability of such opportunities.

I started studying and I done my first degree while I was in custody, yeah. Youth justice. I was able to go to...through the Open University. Didn't matter which jail that I went to. So over the years of me breaking and thing...I've always used the resources within the prison, so even though, yeah, I was a prolific offender, I was a prolific offender who took every piece of education that the prison was able to give me.

Once you're made a D Cat you're able to go to work. So I was two years into my sentence then, and I decided to apply for ROTL. So my governor sat down and she asked me a load of questions. She was, like, well, looking at your paperwork you're meant to get a no straight away. But I know you, and I know the achievements that you've made and I would like to back you in any way that I can, and I don't want you to let me down, so I need to hear from you, like, I need to really hear from you what are you seeking and where are you going? And why is it that you want to? Yes, yes, and as harsh as she was, a lot of people didn't actually like her and I loved her, because I just thought that she was quite real in her evaluation of each prisoner.

I started working and I volunteered. But I didn't just volunteer. I was the first person within my establishment ever to receive a paid job still inside prison. Someone to receive paid work while being a D Cat. So I started off part time as a project coordinator.

We spoke to the [new] governor and...There's a rule in the prison that says that if you work they take 40% of your money. The governor, basically, overrode that because of my flat. And I was saying to him listen, Sir, like, my money's finished, like, Sir, I'm gonna lose my flat. I've got, like, a year and something left, and I don't see why I should keep my flat for, like, nearly three years and then lose it at the last moment. That don't make no sense. So he was, like, OK. And he approved for me to keep all of my wages. And then from there, I always wanted to be a case worker...I was just about to come out. I had, like, three months or something left, but yeah, I was a D Cat. And I became a fully qualified case worker. I'd proven that I was able to do all of the work and all of the paperwork that comes with it, and also hit targets and exit people...it was really good. I enjoyed it.

Lisa is now a full-time staff member at a project supporting gang-involved young people leaving custody.

Situational prevention

Wortley's (2002) overview of situational strategies for the reduction of prison violence, suggests that:

- Single-cell accommodation can reduce crowding and show respect for a prisoner's territory (precipitation-control), while also 'target hardening' a prisoner (opportunity reduction, or regulation-control)
- Increasing female prisoner control over their environments can encourage compliance and reduce frustration (precipitation-control)
- Small or subdivided prisons can reduce anonymity (precipitation-control)
- Age-heterogeneous populations can reduce both inappropriate imitation and conformity (precipitation-control)
- Increasing female staff may encourage compliance and reduce frustration (precipitation-control), reducing assaults on staff
- Elimination of blind spots may improve formal and natural surveillance (regulation-control)

Hemel and Thomson (2005) contend that *Whole Prison* approaches to reducing violence which are analogous with Whole School approaches to prevent bullying are strongly supported by research conducted in British prisons by Edgar and O'Donnell (1998). This research found that successful antibullying policies were contingent upon enhanced communication between inmates and staff and related situational prevention measures, prisoner education programmes, staff training and victim support (Hemel and Thomson, 2005).

Gang members and mental health

The recently published report entitled *The mental health needs of gang-affiliated young people* (Hughes et al, 2015) identifies the high rate of mental illness faced by young people involved with gangs. Hughes et al claim that 'gang members are at increased risk of a range of mental health conditions including conduct disorder, antisocial personality disorder, anxiety, psychosis and drug and alcohol dependence'.

In particular, the central place of serious violence within the culture of the gang means that gang-involved young people are both potential victims as well as perpetrators. Such exposure to violence, especially over the long term, is associated with psychological problems including depression, conduct disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder. Citing the work of Khan et al (2013), Hughes et al remind us of the following statistics after the analysis of data from health screening initiatives with young people (mainly 10 to 18 year olds) at the point of arrest:

- Almost 40% of those who were gang members (of both sexes) had signs of severe behavioural problems before the age of 12, compared with 13% of general youth justice entrants.
- Around a quarter had a suspected mental health diagnosis and over a quarter were suffering sleeping or eating problems (compared with less than 10% for general entrants).
- One in three female and one in ten male gang members were considered at risk of suicide or self-harm.

Khan et al, 2013, cited in Hughes et al, 2015

These statistics demonstrate the need for the secure estate to undertake appropriate screening of gang-involved young people in order to ensure that the necessary support is available to inmates as part of their violence and self-harm reduction strategy.

One focus group respondent believed that a 'trauma-based' approach which acknowledges the violence these young people had witnessed and the world from which they come should inform responses to violence in penal institutions (Wright and Liddle, 2014).

” And the trauma of that isn't dealt with either, and they end up in custody as victims as well as perpetrators...they are only dealt with as a perpetrator. And they never understand the meaning of trauma. So to them seeing someone shot it goes into their psyche and it is left there, and so they have never understood what trauma is, so then...It is based on their behaviour. Why are you actually doing that? They don't even know why they are doing it, but it is because you've seen your mate get shot or stabbed to death, and you have had that based in your psyche.

YOS professional

Regime legitimacy

Bottoms (2003) maintains that the control of violence is inextricably linked with whether, and the extent to which, the prison regime is perceived by inmates as being legitimate. Citing the findings of the Woolf Inquiry into the 1990 UK prison disturbances, he proposes 'a speculative interactive model' of good order in prisons which gives a central place to *legitimation*, which he sees as a product of:

- The perceived fairness of staff
- The perceived fairness of the prison regime
- The perception of distributive fairness, by which he means the quality of the complaints and disciplinary systems

Desistance from gang involvement

An evaluation undertaken for Catch 22 (Setty et al, 2014) found that a scheme at HMP Thameside had helped to reduce violence by 75% by enabling inmates to desist from gang involvement. The Catch 22 worker and the HMP/Serco senior custodial group offending case manager visit each new arrival within 12 hours to find out whether they are gang involved. If they say they are, a management plan is drawn up to ensure that antagonistic gang members are put into different parts of the prison and have different times for activities and visits. They also keep in contact with them in case any other issues arise and conflict resolution is required. Between April 2013 and October 2014 the number of violent incidents at HMP Thameside dropped from approximately 90 per month to fewer than 20. The evaluation is based on 19 'in-depth interviews' with young prisoners, semi-structured interviews with prison staff, including a representative from the wings, the violence reduction team and the gangs team and an analysis of incidents of violence and misconduct in the prison. The scheme also involves a 'Model Prisoners' programme in which ex-gang-involved young people are trained to be 'gang reps' who mentor other young people.

The evaluators suggest that gang-involved prisoners do not simply recreate neighbourhood gangs inside the prison because there are insufficient numbers to make this viable. The reconfigured gangs in prison are, however, territorial in the sense that affiliates are often drawn from a particular geographical area. But affiliations may change in response to changing events within the prison. Some prisoners were heavily involved in gangs, while others drifted 'in and out of offending with a peer group'. Unlike Wood and Adler (2001), the evaluators did not find that gang-involved prisoners were exercising control of drug and other contraband markets. In line with other research they found that gang-involved prisoners were more likely to be involved in violent incidents.

The young people interviewed in Setty et al's report (2014) said that contact with the outside, including family, could help young people desist from gang involvement. However, such contact could also trigger feelings of sadness because it was a reminder of what they were missing. There is not always a willingness for families to maintain contact with their loved ones as this young man we spoke to explained.

” When you come out after two and a half years obviously a lot of people’s families don’t wanna know them, hence my reason...I didn’t get any contact from my parents and that ‘cause, you know, by the time I was 21 I went to jail five times. How many times can your parents keep coming to see you? How many times can they keep giving you a bit of change? And my mum’s a lone parent. She struggles to do good for me and my brother and she did do very well for us. I mean, we didn’t have everything but we had enough, hundred percent. But my mum seems to, you know, got to that place where...I’m good with her now, but for the first year I didn’t get any contact with my parents.

24-year-old male released in 2011

Relationships with gang members in the community could also be difficult to maintain, and some said that *road (gang) friends are not true friends*. All those interviewed were emphatic that they did not want to come back to custody and Setty, one of the report’s authors, said that ‘A substantial minority of the 19 interviewed explicitly stated that they had exited (gangs)’. She continued, ‘What became clear, however, was that although they would say this, it was still possible for these prisoners to drift in and out of offending with the group’. The report makes five recommendations:

- 1** The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) to work with prison establishments to support the introduction and adoption of effective mechanisms to identify gang-involved prisoners. NOMS to work with the police and other agencies to facilitate the exchange of information prisons need.
- 2** The Home Office EGYV team to work with prison establishments to support the introduction and adoption of a standardised process to assess the nature of issues related to gangs faced by prison establishments.
- 3** Prison establishments to adopt mechanisms for identifying the circumstances in which issues are likely to arise, and pre-emptive methods to address issues and reduce risk.
- 4** Prison establishments to adopt approaches for addressing issues when they arise and for thorough investigation of incidents to enable staff to tackle the underlying causes of issues.
- 5** Prison establishments, with the support of NOMS, to provide rehabilitation to gang-involved prisoners to encourage gang exit.



BEST PRACTICE PROJECT 507

Project 507 is a personal development programme for gang-associated young men aged 16 to 25 in custody. Funded by NOMS and the European Social Fund, over 200 young men have participated over the last two years. Participants attend three-hour weekly sessions for 12 weeks. It looks at strategies for breaking the cycle of offending, gang awareness, violence in the home, personal violence and how to turn skills learnt in the streets into productive skills. Real-life scenarios are used to help young men to come up with more positive solutions to their own dilemmas.

Objectives:

- 1 To build on young men's strengths and identify and promote confidence, attitudes and behaviours which reduce risk
- 2 To utilise creativity to enable young men at risk of and caught up in gang activity to develop their self-esteem and life skills
- 3 To provide relevant opportunities for young men at risk of offending/currently offending to re-engage in education, training and job opportunities
- 4 To meet the unique needs of high-risk young offenders
- 5 To empower young men to reach their full potential and to provide them with choices, decision-making opportunities, and ownership of the work

Project 507 curriculum

Session and title	Aim
1 Me, Myself and I	To introduce the programme, the team, get to know each other and ourselves.
2 The World and I	To understand different kinds of behaviour and relationships including dysfunctional and hurtful ones.
3 The Choices I Make	To explore the possible explanations behind offending behaviour and what might stop people from offending in the future.
4 The Man in Me!	To look at character development and the choices we have before, during and after an offence takes place.
5 Been There Done That!	To use role play to experience all the different perspectives of people affected by crime.
6 Breaking the Cycle	To look at what it means to be a man and the different roles of men within society.
7 It's All About Me!	To look at our own identities.
8 I Am Who I Want To Be!	To think about who we want to be moving forward.
9 Transformation!	To start developing a five-year plan and personal statement.
10 Got The Talk!	To look at language, the way it is used and how it can affect our daily lives.
11 The World's My Oyster!	To reflect over the last ten sessions, using all the knowledge gained to finish plans and personal statements.
12 Closing Ceremony!	To present personal statements either to family members or to staff within the prison.

North American and British research indicates that most gang-involved prisoners come with a history of more serious criminality and violence, poor educational attainment and a patchy work record (Griffin and Hepburn, 2006; Shapland et al, 2012; Ward and Maruna, 2007). Once inside, they tend to affiliate with members of their own neighbourhood gang, or a new gang that has formed in prison. They are also more likely to engage in 'institutional misconduct', including violence, extortion and the sale of drugs and other contraband. These violations tend to be dealt with by solitary confinement which prevents these inmates from attending workshops where they might gain new skills, or educational programmes that will help them to take up training, legitimate employment or further education upon release (Griffin and Hepburn, 2006).

When gang members are released and return to their neighbourhoods, they often find that, because gangs are usually in a state of flux (Harding, 2014), the power relationships within and between local gangs have changed and that they cannot occupy the role they vacated when they were imprisoned. Moreover, the control they once exerted over territory or an illicit business may have passed to another gang member or another gang. There may also be an expectation from their erstwhile associates that in order to restore the respect which they once held, they will need to visit retribution upon those who have 'dissed' them while they have been away. And if this involves a girlfriend who has 'dumped' or 'two-timed' them while they were inside, the need to do so may be even more pressing.

On the other hand, if a high status gang member serves a long enough sentence they may find that on their return their gang has been absorbed into a new gang with new leaders and new business interests. It may also be the case that, because of the time that has elapsed, they may not be known by a new 'generation' of gang members. In summing up the findings of their research into gang re-entry Pyrooz et al (2011) indicate that:

The evidence that does exist is only suggestive, but several conclusions can be drawn. First, gang members are 'hard cases'; that is, they are likely to become the targets of institutional control through misconduct, disciplinary hearings, segregation and 'jacketing'. Second, and as a consequence of such behaviour, they are isolated from routine programming, educational and employment opportunities available to the general prison population. Third, while in prison gang members are likely to form new alliances with prison gangs that differ from the ones they had on the street before entering prison. Fourth, when leaving prison, gang members find a changed landscape in their communities and the gangs that they once belonged to. Finally, as a consequence of this, gang members have among the highest risks for return to prison. While considerable effort is expended on prevention of gang membership, promoting gang desistance on the part of gang members leaving prison needs careful scrutiny.

Factors promoting desistance from gang crime

Such evidence as we have suggests a number of points or situations where gang-involved young people may desist from gang crime. However, desisting from gang crime, as Deane et al (2007) argue, does not necessarily mean leaving the gang. Although research suggests that dissociation from delinquent peers facilitates desistance (Farrington, 1996), for those who have been embroiled in serious gang conflict, continued involvement may well be a prerequisite of personal safety (Pitts, 2008 and 2011).

Young people may desist from gang crime and intensive gang involvement following the death or serious injury of a friend or relative. Indeed, researchers have observed that constant exposure to

violence may promote desistance (Decker and Lauritsen, 2002). Some young people desist when they make the transition from school to college, while others step back from gang involvement when they set up home with a partner or when they become a parent (Hagedorn, 1998).

” It is the responsibility. It is your responsibility. No one can take that away from you. That’s your kid. So obviously when like...Obviously what made me promise them, is when I went to see my daughter the first time I came out, and I said I have got to go home. She thought I was going back to the prison, she didn’t want me to leave. So that’s what made me think, oh right I have got to do this now. I’ve got to stay out. So it is good. It is a nice feeling. It is a good feeling to think that you are wanted, obviously it is your daughter you have got to look after her, do what you have got to do. So I just try my best.

22-year-old father whose daughter was born when he was 15 and who had been in jail all of his daughter’s life until now.

Apprehension by the police and the prospect of imprisonment causes some gang-involved young people to change their ways, while access to legitimate educational or vocational opportunities or starting a legitimate business works for others.

However, the research also shows that desistance from crime is a process rather than an event (Bateman, Hazel and Wright, 2013; Bottoms et al, 2004; Cromwell et al, 1991; Maruna, 2001). In his study of gang-involved street robbers, Briggs (2008), like other researchers, found that arrest, new relationships, the intervention of a youth worker, the experience of personal injury or witnessing the death or serious injury of a friend could precipitate desistance. However, for Briggs’ respondents desistance was not a sudden, ‘once-and-for-all’ event. He writes:

Desistance is therefore contextual and contingent. Often these ‘crossroad’ decisions are skewed by the ease with which money can be made illegally, and this contrasts starkly with the lack of capital, credibility and ‘rep’ yielded by the low-paid jobs, for which they have the requisite experience and qualifications (Collinson, 1996). This lack of status-conferring legitimate opportunity and disillusionment with mainstream institutions, as well as the prospect of ‘starting again’ at the ‘bottom of the ladder’ in a new sphere, serves as a powerful disincentive to desistance. Whether these young men continue to desist, however, is uncertain although their ambition for a better life remains firmly in their words.

Briggs, 2008

The one consistent finding from desistance research is that age is a major determinant of desistance from crime in general and gang involvement and gang crime in particular (Harding, 2014; Piquero, Farrington and Blumstein, 2007; Smith et al, 2005). The ‘drop-out rate’ from gangs between the early teens and the mid-20s is over 75% (Harding, 2014), suggesting that most young people ‘mature out’ of gang involvement. However, as several studies have found, this maturation is by no means automatic, but rather a process facilitated by particular life events such as a stable job and ‘a good marriage’ (Sampson and Laub, 1992), which give the subject ‘an increased investment in society’ and hence a greater ‘stake in conformity’ (Farrall, 2000; Farrington et al, 1986; Sampson and Laub, 1992 and 1993).

Bjørgero (1999) suggests that interventions designed to promote gang desistance should take cognisance of Spergel’s distinction between a ‘chronic gang problem’, characterised by persistent and acute patterns of gang-related crime and violence lasting for many years, and an emerging gang problem in which the crime and violence is less organised and less virulent (Spergel et al, 1994). Bjørgero contends that emerging gangs may well ‘fall apart’ of their own accord and that such disintegration might be facilitated by the right kinds of intervention, although he does not specify what this might be. He identifies six main processes that may work separately or in combination to bring about the disintegration of the gang:

- 1 Growing out of gang life through natural maturation and new priorities in life.
- 2 Defeat of the group by external use of force.
- 3 Loss of external enemies or threat.
- 4 Loss of identity, status and image.
- 5 Decay of group cohesiveness, solidarity and attraction value.
- 6 Fragmentation of the group into smaller units which may be too weak to survive.

Undoubtedly this type of disintegration boosts the gang drop-out rate, but it remains the case that 'chronic gang problems' (Spergel et al, 1994) exist and at the heart of these problems are the Olders and Elders identified by Harding who tend to be the people who orchestrate the activities of younger affiliates and reap the greatest rewards from gang crime (Harding, 2014).

It's different for girls

Both Graham and Bowling (1995) and Bateman and Hazel (2014d) observe that the pathways into and out of crime are different in important respects for girls and young women. Some North American studies found the major differences to be years spent in education and the presence of children (Sommers et al, 1994; Uggen and Kruttschnitt, 1998). Much less is known about gang-involved girls and young women, however. While pregnancy is often cited as one of the reasons women leave gangs (Nimmo, 2001), some UK research shows that so-called baby mothers remain gang involved while they are pregnant and after they have given birth (Harding, 2014; Pitts, 2008).

Gang crime, desistance and the neighbourhood effect

In 1993, Sampson and Laub noted that:

There is increasing evidence that the probability of adolescent risks becoming transmuted into adverse adult circumstances is greatest among those in disadvantaged racial and economic positions.

Sampson and Laub, 1993

As the veteran gang scholar Klein has observed, individual change or desistance decision making is severely limited in what he describes as 'poorly organized communities'. He argues that would-be social reformers lack the necessary 'leverage' to alter the lives of committed gang members because the resources to hand are too meagre to change individual life trajectories that have been taking shape for 15 or 20 years (Klein, 2007). Several scholars argue that the level of 'social disorganisation' in the poorest neighbourhoods has a profound impact upon the stress levels of parents, the degree of familial control they can realistically exert, and the exposure of their children to delinquent peers (Bell, 2009; Currie, 1985; Krohn and Thornberry, 2003).

The Pittsburgh Child Development Study analysed the lives of over 15,000 young people in the city (Wikstrom and Loeber, 1997). The researchers found that offending by subjects with no, or very low, individual and familial risk factors, occurred significantly more frequently in the lowest Socio-Economic Status (SES) neighbourhoods, and that the relationship between these risk factors and serious offending 'broke down' for those living in the most disadvantaged communities. These findings challenge what Currie (1985) calls the 'fallacy of autonomy', the idea that the behaviour of individuals and their families can be separated out from the circumstances in which they live. Gladwell (2000) states the matter succinctly when he says that, given the choice, it is far better to come from a troubled family in a good neighbourhood than a good family in a troubled neighbourhood.

Some commentators argue that the spatial concentration of social disadvantage is a result of poor neighbourhoods becoming spatially segregated from local economies (see McGahey, 1986, for example). Economic segregation sets in train processes that further isolate these neighbourhoods

because, as McGahey (1986) suggests, residents in poor, high-crime neighbourhoods, tend to derive their livelihoods from the 'informal economy' and 'secondary sector' labour markets, characterised by low wages and sporadic, dead-end work, supplemented by:

government transfers, employment and training programmes, crime and illegal hustles which constitute important additional sources of income, social organisation and identity for the urban poor.

Another key characteristic of high-crime neighbourhoods is that skilled, economically mobile, adult workers leave them and their departure serves to further destabilise the neighbourhood, thereby deepening family poverty. He writes:

The quality and quantity of jobs in a neighbourhood determine the ways people form households, regulate their own, and the public behaviour of others, and use public services. The resulting neighbourhood atmosphere then helps to shape the incentives for residents to engage in legitimate employment or income-oriented crime. A high level of adult involvement in primary sector employment spawns stable households, stable families, stable social relationships and enhanced vocational opportunities for the next generation.

And, of course, a low level of adult involvement in primary sector employment produces the opposite.

Socio-political marginalisation

A further characteristic of these neighbourhoods is that residents tend not to be connected to locally influential social and political networks (Wilson, 1987). This denies them information about social, educational or vocational opportunity as well as access to the political influence that could improve their situation (Morris, 1995). It is not that people in these neighbourhoods have no 'social capital' but rather that their social capital tends to be 'sustaining but constraining', enabling them to 'get by', to survive the day-to-day struggle, but not to 'get on', by moving out of their present situation and into the social and economic mainstream (Densley, 2013; De Souza Briggs, 1998; Pettit and McLanahan, 2001).

MODELS OF INTERVENTION IN GANG-AFFECTED NEIGHBOURHOODS

The role of prevention

There is an intuitive appeal for school-based preventative work. Across the country, various projects undertake schools work of this nature which, according to the young people involved, seems to be fairly successful. The MPS's *Growing Against Gangs and Violence* (GAGV) programme instituted in 2010 has so far reached around 9,000 school students in Lambeth. This has been developed in partnership with Lambeth schools (Andell and Pitts, 2013). However, if evidence exists to support a claim that this kind of intervention actually stops young people getting involved in gang crime, it is not known to the researchers. Research in the US says schools work does not make much difference; on the contrary, it alerts some young people who would not otherwise have thought about it to the joys of gang life. Nonetheless, opportunities which allow for a conversation to start with young people about the choices they make and the consequences of their decisions would be deemed helpful, as a member of St Giles Trust's SOS Project's schools prevention team describes.

” We're doing school prevention intervention stuff, and what I find is this year we've been called into a lot of primary schools to do stuff with year sixes, sort of, going into year seven, 'cause those are the ones that, sort of, ending up as victims of negative peer pressure from their peers, and people that are older, sort of, manipulating and getting them to do things that they don't necessarily wanna do. And a lot of the young kids I'm working with, I'm surprised. I'm thinking...a lot of these young kids are very smart, intelligent, some of them have got good backgrounds and they're just, sort of, aspiring to the wrong things and going on the wrong path, showing off in front of their peers, and falling foul to pressure. And one of my key messages within my presentations is all it takes is one mistake. That one mistake can affect your whole future, and I just...we, sort of, look at a whole array of different consequences from affecting your family all the way down to your CRB, DBS checks and stuff like that, as well. And yeah, yeah. The joint enterprise is a massive one, massive.

Project worker, St Giles Trust's SOS Project

One of the differences between the experiences of gang-involved young people and other returning prisoners is that many will have been involved in gang-desistance programmes prior to their incarceration. Because of the nature of the process of gang desistance, it is not uncommon for young people involved in these kinds of programmes to be arrested, convicted and imprisoned for gang-related offences. Youth workers and mentors in these programmes interviewed by Pitts (2011) emphasised the importance of project workers maintaining contact with these young people during their period of incarceration in order that the desistance work in which they had been involved would not be undermined in the prison or the YOI. They observed that these young people often needed additional, personalised, support during their return to the community, ideally from a key worker, youth worker or peer mentor, whom they have known, trusted and kept in contact with during their time 'inside'.

For other voluntary sector agencies intervening with incarcerated gang members, the key to successful and sustained intervention appears to be making contact fairly early in the young person's sentence, personalising that contact via handwritten letters, and visits from one identified worker, rather than printed or typed letters or brochures with a 'take it or leave it' contact address, and, crucially, for the support worker to do what they say they are going to do and to give the young person regular feedback about what they are doing.

The impact of the *Transforming Rehabilitation* agenda is as yet unknown. Some resettlement providers have welcomed the extension of statutory post-custody supervision to those who previously did not benefit from any statutory support on release. From the point of view of gang-involved young people this might provide an opportunity to maximise the potential for taking advantage of the

'window of opportunity' that the transition from custody to the community involves (Bateman, Hazel and Wright, 2013). Other commentators, however, have criticised the compulsory nature of the measures, arguing that they might increase the risk of breach and recall (see for instance Prison Reform Trust, 2013).

Multi-agency working

Effective intervention with returning gang members requires the participation of different agencies and organisations and evidence suggests that this is best delivered via the type of co-located, community-based, gang-desistance programme discussed above (Bateman and Pitts, 2005; Pitts, 2011). However, if this is to happen, the intensity and duration of the work will need to be recognised in both the programme's funding and the training and support offered to its workers.

The Comprehensive Gang Model (see below) designed by Spergel for the US government, remains the intellectual bedrock of most gang intervention programmes in North America, mainland Europe and the UK today (Spergel and Grossman, 1998).

In 1994 the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), part of the US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, launched a series of four and five-year demonstration projects, testing the model in five different cities. One of the larger programmes, the Little Village Gang Violence Reduction Project in Chicago, compared outcomes for 195 'program youths', 90 'quasi-program youths' who received some services, and 208 youths who received no services. In their evaluation of Little Village, the researchers (Spergel and Grossman, 1998) concluded that:

- Targeted gang members experienced fewer arrests for serious gang crimes compared with the control group.
- The coordinated project approach, using a combination of social interventions and suppression was more effective for more violent youths.
- The sole use of youth workers was more effective for less violent youths.
- The programme was more effective in assisting older youths to reduce their criminal activities (particularly violence) and doing so more quickly than if no project services had been provided.
- Residents in target areas reported significantly greater improvement in community conditions, perceptions of gang crime, and police effectiveness.

The Comprehensive Gang Model

On the basis of this research, Spergel and Grossman (1998) developed their Comprehensive Gang Model consisting of five key elements:

1. Community mobilization. Local citizens and organizations are involved in a common enterprise. The program consists of local police officers, probation officers, community youth workers, church groups, boys and girls clubs, community organizations, and local residents working as a team to understand the gang structures and provide social intervention and social opportunities whenever they can.

2. Social intervention. The program reaches out to youths unable to connect with legitimate social institutions. The youth, the gang structure, and the environmental resources must be taken into account before the youth is provided with crisis counselling, family counselling, or referral to services such as drug treatment, jobs, training, educational programs, or recreation.

3. Provision of social opportunities. Youths at different points in their lives need different things. Older gang members may be ready to enter the legitimate job field and need training and education to do so. Younger youths at risk of becoming gang members may need alternative schools or family counselling. The program should provide individualized services for each youth based on his or her needs.

4. Suppression. This not only consists of surveillance, arrest, probation, and imprisonment to stop violent behaviour but also involves good communication between agency service providers and control providers. All providers jointly decide what happens to a particular youth when trouble arises or when it is about to.

5. Organizational change and development of local agencies and groups. All workers need to work closely with one another and collaborate. Former gang members working as community youth workers need to be given as much respect as the police officers in the program. Each group can provide important information for the program that the other may not be able to obtain.

In three OJJDP demonstration sites there was no statistically significant change in arrest patterns, which Spergel and Grossman (1998) attribute to 'poor program implementation'. These communities had difficulty establishing successful interagency collaboration and tended to neglect one or more of the five required program elements.

Operation ceasefire

The OJJDP model, with its emphasis on interagency collaboration, community involvement and joint social and criminal justice intervention with gang members, was a key point of reference in the development of Operation Ceasefire, the influential strategy devised by Kennedy for the Boston Police Gang Unit in the USA in the 1990s. Kennedy (2007) describes his model as a 'focused deterrence strategy, harnessing a multitude of different agencies plus resources from within the community'. The objective of Operation Ceasefire was simple enough. It aimed to save lives and reduce serious injury. It did not aim to 'smash' gangs, although it appears that defection from gangs was a side effect of the initiative. The strategy had three elements:

Engagement with gang members to elicit information, to transmit consistent messages about targeted crackdowns and provide diversionary services for members and those on the fringe of gangs.

Co-ordinated leverage on gangs through highly publicised multi-agency crackdowns on certain specified behaviours i.e. possession or use of knives and firearms, harassment and serious assaults.

Enhancing community relations to get local support for targeted crackdowns, stimulate community 'collective efficacy' in the development of informal social control and the reduction of incivilities.

Desistance strategies in the UK

Following the implementation of Operation Ceasefire in 1996, a rigorous analysis was conducted by the John F Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University (Braga et al, 2001), which concluded that the programme had been responsible for a fall in youth homicides in Boston from an average of 44 per year between 1991 and 1995 to 26 in 1996 and 15 in 1997, a trend that continued during 1998 and 1999. A modified version of Operation Ceasefire, with its emphasis on *Engagement with gang members, co-ordinated leverage and enhancing community relations* has been adopted in both Glasgow and Manchester (Aldridge et al, 2008; CIRV, 2011).

The Glasgow Model

Research undertaken by the Glasgow police in 2007 revealed that there were 170 street gangs in the city, with an estimated 3,500 members aged between 11 and 23. Comparing police reports with the accounts of trauma surgeons and accident and emergency staff showed as many as two thirds of knife crimes were not being reported to the police. In October 2008 the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit launched its Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV). The Glasgow initiative has three basic components:

A zero-tolerance police warning that if the violence doesn't stop, relentless targeted enforcement will follow.

A commitment from educational, youth serving and social care agencies that if young people desist from violence they will be helped with education, training and employment.

'Call ins' which known gang members are invited to attend where family members of deceased or badly injured gang members, police and doctors detail the human cost of gang activity and gang culture and the participants are invited to sign a pledge to renounce violence and work with the CIRV programme.

There have been ten call ins since 2008, and of the 473 gang members who have attended, 400 have signed up to a pledge of non-violence. CIRV claims that since its inception there has been a 46% reduction in violence among those who signed the pledge. Moreover, those who have taken part in the most intensive programmes are said to have cut their offending by 73% and knife carrying among participants has dropped by almost 60%.

However, as CIRV's initial research indicated, these tend to be offences with low levels of reporting. Moreover, during the same period there has been a 25% drop in violent offending among gang members in areas of the city where the CIRV did not yet operate, which could suggest that knowledge of the programme was having some kind of palliative effect or, conversely, that the CIRV programme outcomes were benefitting from a more general decline in gang violence in the city (Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, 2011).

The Manchester Model

Manchester Multi-Agency Gang Strategy (MMAGS) was launched in 2001, in response to research undertaken by Bullock and Tilley (2002). This research, based on data compiled by Greater Manchester Police, revealed that between April 2001 and March 2002, South Manchester gangs were responsible for 11 fatal shootings, 84 serious woundings and 639 other incidents of violence involving firearms. It also showed that most of the perpetrators and victims were in their teens and that many of those responsible for the shootings had themselves been shot at some point.

These shootings were highly localised to the two main gang-affected areas in South Manchester, where in 1999 68% of the shootings took place. 30 of the 46 gun crime victims identified in the study lived in these two areas and in the second half of 1999 these areas saw six gang-related murders in five months (Bullock and Tilley, 2002).

MMAGS represented a partnership between police, probation, the youth offending service (YOS), education services, housing services, children's services and statutory and voluntary youth services. The partnership focused upon gangs in the Longsight and Moss Side areas of south Manchester. Based in part on the Boston (USA) Operation Ceasefire model, MMAGS added three additional elements:

- 1 A gang mediation service** to address long-standing rivalries and emerging tensions that caused shootings.
- 2 Targeted protection/containment** for victims and repeat victims, because those who survive attacks may retaliate or be victimised again.
- 3 Sensitisation of agencies** to the conditions that foster gang violence, its effects and their responsibilities under Section 17 (Community Safety) of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998).

MMAGS employed a group of full-time staff seconded from the police, youth service, education and probation to form a virtual team which offered diversionary, educational, recreational and vocational activities to young people in, or on the fringes of, youth gangs. At any one time they worked with up to 75 gang-involved individuals, aged between 10 and 25. Participation in the programme was primarily voluntary, although some youngsters were required to cooperate with MMAGS as a condition of a court order or licence (Corrigan, 2007). The project also ran sessions in schools and youth centres on issues such as gang culture, firearms legislation and peer pressure.

Although MMAGS was, in effect, a statutory partnership it had an independent advisory group composed of community members and it met regularly with Mothers Against Violence, Victim

Support and several other local voluntary sector organisations. In its first 12 months of operation MMAGS made contact with over 200 gang-involved young people and during this time, only around 10% of this 'target group' were known to have reoffended (Corrigan, 2007; Pitts, 2008). MMAGS had a remarkable impact upon the young people it targeted and from 2001 played a major role in the steady reduction of gang firearms discharges, deaths and associated injuries. The other key element in the success of the Manchester gang strategy was the creation of the Xcalibre gangs unit by Greater Manchester Police.

In August 2004 Assistant Chief Constable Ian Seabridge launched the unit, which was charged with creating 'gun free streets' in Greater Manchester. Xcalibre has three elements:

- 1 A small squad that focuses on the criminal business organisations** supplying firearms and Class A drugs to gangs
- 2 A critical incident team that investigates gang-related shootings**
- 3 The Xcalibre Taskforce;** a team of one inspector, two sergeants and 15 constables

Xcalibre officers backed by social workers set out to identify gang-involved young people and to introduce themselves to them. Patrols went out every day covering the streets and the 'corners' where they 'hung out'. Xcalibre adopted a policy of never driving past a suspect but always stopping and talking to them. They talked to them about the risks to themselves, their families and friends from continued gang involvement. At the outset, this talking served primarily as a warning to these young men and women about the potential consequences of their gang involvement. However, this talking was delivered with warmth and respect, and it was accompanied by offers of legitimate routes out of the gang via programmes developed by MMAGS and tailored to the circumstances, interests and capabilities of individual young people.

This strategy of intensive contact had the immediate effect of reducing the numbers of firearms being carried on the street. Street gangs are sustained through the recruitment of younger siblings and their associates (BRAP, 2012) and so Xcalibre focused particularly on minors; the younger siblings and associates of known gang members who they found hanging out with them on the streets and who were therefore assumed to be vulnerable to gang involvement, and hence 'at risk'. The police and social workers take them home and issue their parents with a 'Statement of Concern'. This 'Statement of Concern' triggers a multi-agency case conference which includes representatives from education, health, probation and the local safeguarding board, to consider the vulnerability of the child or young person, their siblings and associates, and to put in place a relevant social intervention. From 2007, the average age of gang-involved young people began to rise, indicating that the strategy of diverting younger siblings and associates away from gang crime was working.

Another early sign of success for this new strategy came when Greater Manchester Police recorded the largest gap between firearms discharges in Manchester, from mid-February to July 2008, since 1990. This coincided with the sentencing of 11 high-profile members of the Gooch Close gang which demonstrated that gang-related offending would attract severe sentences. From 2009, the long prison sentences imposed on notorious local gangsters, 'intensive' policing and the co-location of a multi-disciplinary team saw death and injury resulting from firearms crime fall even further, until in 2012/13 there were no firearms fatalities in Longsight or Moss Side.

A tale of two cities

Both the Glasgow and Manchester models derive from Boston's Operation Ceasefire but they have developed differently. While Glasgow has embraced a 'public health' model (Ritter, 2009) in which gang-related violence is regarded as a kind of intergenerationally transmitted 'epidemic', Manchester has adopted what might be described as an 'ecological' model (Suttles, 1972) in which gang-related youth violence is seen primarily as a function of neighbourhood histories, the

contemporary social networks in which individuals are embedded, their relationship with upper echelon criminal business organisations and the effects of social and ethnic change on the nature and level of youth violence. The Manchester strategy is also segmented, pursuing different strategies for different elements of the gang problem. However, these differences of approach are not simply conceptual, and may be shaped by real differences in the histories and characteristics of the social, cultural and ethnic groups they target.

Present-day Glasgow gangs have their origins in the conflicts which arose in the city in the 1880s. The original Glasgow gangs were divided between those which were solely territorial and those that combined territorial and sectarian allegiances. While originally a largely Protestant city, in the late 19th and early 20th century large numbers of poor Irish Roman Catholics migrated to Glasgow, drawn by the job opportunities in the heavy industries around the Clyde and the better quality of life they offered. As a result, youth gangs formed in the low-income neighbourhoods in which the migrants settled. With the advent of mass unemployment in the early 1930s the conflicts intensified and it became fairly common for men in their 20s and even 30s to remain active members of street gangs (Davies, 1998).

Unlike gang-affected neighbourhoods in London and Manchester, which are characterised by housing churn as successive waves of migrants pass through them, the populations of Glasgow's gang-affected neighbourhoods have remained fairly stable over several generations. Moreover, whereas gang-involved young people in London and Manchester tend to be implicated in drug dealing, in Glasgow the problem of violence is compounded by high levels of alcohol consumption and illicit drug use (Harding, 2014; Pitts, 2008).

The Glasgow model is based on the assumption that a predisposition for violence is a consequence of intergenerational cultural transmission which can be identified at an early age or stage in the child or young person's development (see section on early/late-onset youth violence on page 16). Thus, interventions aim to mitigate or neutralise these familially-induced childhood risk factors. Implicit in this approach is the belief that, over time, a predisposition for violence can, in effect, be 'bred-out' of the targeted populations.

DEVELOPING A GANG-DESISTANCE STRATEGY

In their review of desistance research undertaken for the US National Gang Center, Arciaga-Young and Gonzalez (2013) outline the principles which should inform interventions with gang-involved young people. They emphasise that effective intervention takes place when the client recognises, or is encouraged to recognise, that they are ready to leave the gang and live in a different way. At this point they suggest:

- Interventionists should have a current working knowledge of local gangs and gang dynamics.
- Interventionists should coach clients on interactions with the gang and avoiding safety risks.
- Interventionists should work to establish connections with law enforcement and criminal justice agencies to address issues with client safety.
- Interventionists should establish relationships with agencies that assist with education, employment, substance abuse, family problems, and other services clients need.
- Gang desistance is a long-term process that involves helping clients identify and change their self-image, internal scripts, personal behaviour, and goals.
- Desistance plans need to be developed and revised as necessary based on a client's current needs.
- Interventionists should reach out to family members, and supportive professionals who can encourage and support clients' efforts to change.

Putting it into practice

A study of 'commissioning' or 'public service purchasing' undertaken by the Social Science Research Unit at the Institute for Education, London (Social Science Research Unit, 2009) concluded that joint commissioning is successful where:

- There are trusting relationships between the commissioners and commissioned services built up over time by continuity of staff.
- There is clarity about responsibilities and legal frameworks, particularly in relation to shared or pooled finances.
- There is co-terminosity between organisational and geographical boundaries.
- There are clear structures, information systems and communications between stakeholders.

The success of the MMAGS is attributable in no small part to the fact that it fulfilled most of the criteria specified by the Social Science Research Unit. Representatives of the relevant agencies were co-located and an agreement was reached between the leader of the council and the chief constable to ring-fence expenditure on the gang strategy and to offer incentives for personnel to stay in their respective roles for several years in order to develop a culture of trust between the statutory agencies and voluntary sector providers, as well as effective formal and informal mechanisms for sharing information.

In *Gangs at the Grass Roots: Community Solutions to Street Violence*, Brand and Ollerenshaw (2009) suggest that integrated multi-agency gang strategies are successful to the extent that those commissioning them are able to exert control or influence over:

- The integration of community members into the strategy
- The credibility and capacity of the strategy

- The coordination of the strategy
- The commissioning of the strategy
- The review of the strategy
- The targeting of local interventions

To that end they commend the establishment of a Strategy and Commissioning Board which would include:

- The council leader or the relevant cabinet member
- The director of children and young people's services
- A senior police officer with responsibility for the policing of gangs
- A senior representative from the YOS
- A senior representative from probation
- The chair of the voluntary sector children and young people's group
- Rotating representation from programme providers
- The youth mayor
- Previous participants in commissioned gang programmes

A body not dissimilar to this was established by MMAGS in Manchester in the early part of the 21st century and remains influential.

However, this model fails to include crucial components of an integrated gang strategy; namely senior representation from community safety professionals and schools. Moreover, it also fails to specify where the day-to-day leadership of the strategy would lie and the degree of authority that would be invested in such leadership, particularly in relation to the joint commissioning of services. High-profile leadership and high-level support have been a feature of both the Glasgow and Manchester gang strategies.

The prerequisites of effective partnership working

In 2010 the Home Office established 12 pilot sites to explore how community safety partnerships could tackle organised crime more effectively (van Staden et al, 2011). Critical components of successful partnerships proved to be a combination of strong partnership arrangements, available resources, particularly staff time, and a willingness and ability to share information. This echoes the findings of McGarrell et al (2006) whose study of partnership approaches to tackling gun crime in the US indicated that the more of these elements that were present, the greater the reductions in firearms incidents.

Other factors found to facilitate effective partnership working were 'strategic oversight' (McGarrell et al, 2006), the presence of scheme champions (Davison et al, 2010), ensuring buy-in and mutual benefit across agencies and good communication between partner organisations (McGarrell et al, 2006; Winterfield et al, 2006). In a similar vein, reviews of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPAs) suggest that improved communication between partner organisations and the development of common objectives can enhance effective partnership working. Reviews of both Integrated Offender Management (Senior et al, 2011) and the Prolific and Priority Offender Scheme (Dawson, 2007) echo these findings. Clearly, multi-agency responses to problems of crime and violence, in which information is shared and action is taken by a plurality of agencies can be extremely effective (see for example Florence et al, 2011). There are, however, some barriers to be overcome if multi-agency initiatives are to realise their full potential.

The costs and benefits of partnership working

A commonly identified barrier concerns the complexities of data protection legislation and the struggle to harmonise the plethora of agency data-sharing protocols which multi-agency partnership requires (Pitts/GMP, 2013). Occupational and professional cultures can also prove to be a stumbling block to information exchange (Souhami, 2007). In their review of interagency information sharing Richardson and Asthana (2006) examine the ways in which professional cultures shape the inter-organisational exchange of personal information in a health and social care context. They pose four models of information-sharing behaviours ('ideal', 'over-open', 'over-cautious' and 'chaotic') and suggest that patterns of information sharing may be influenced by the ways in which the professions have traditionally related to one another. In a similar vein White and Featherstone (2005) found that the governmental emphasis on restructuring services to facilitate better communication between different disciplines notwithstanding, co-location did not straightforwardly lead to better communication. They suggest that time-honoured 'professional narratives' may serve to maintain 'ritualised ways of working' which reinforce rather than loosen professional boundaries.

Abstraction versus embeddedness

A further barrier to effectiveness concerns the positioning of gang intervention programmes. As already described on page 23, research for the Children's Commissioner for England (Beckett et al, 2013) revealed that in gang-affected neighbourhoods the violent and sexual victimisation of children and young people, while commonplace, was seldom reported to the 'authorities' because of a belief amongst young people that they would be powerless to stop it and that official intervention might well make matters worse by setting them up for further victimisation.

Most of the agencies established to deal with perpetrators or to 'safeguard' victims, are essentially reactive; intervening after the event in response to a referral; abstracting the young people from their neighbourhood and then putting them through time-limited agency-based programmes before returning them to the situation in which their offences or victimisation occurred. As a result, these agencies are unable to respond to the day-to-day risks of gang involvement, or the social and psychological consequences of living in gang-affected neighbourhoods. They cannot respond to unreported victimisation nor intervene to pre-empt it and nor are they able to mediate between potential adversaries. This is not to say that these services are irrelevant to a gang strategy, but the experiences of both Glasgow and Manchester suggest that embedding workers in gang-affected neighbourhoods and networks is a crucial prerequisite of effective intervention.

Resettlement in the community

Despite the fact that there are a significant number of resettlement programmes available to those in penal institutions, many provided by the voluntary sector, there is no central point where information about them is held. Respondents at the focus groups felt that knowledge of the provision that could be available on release would reduce tension within the institution. However, some of these services appeared to focus on their own needs first, in terms of opening hours, availability of workers and willingness to meet young people prior to release, which respondents saw as crucial to post-release success. They said it was important that whatever the agency was, it should be able to coordinate the resettlement programme with the other agencies to prevent the young people from having to tell their stories dozens of times to different people and, eventually, falling through the net as a result of frustration with the process. Respondents suggested that prisoners may need an advocate who will help them to access the relevant services. This was certainly the case for Rachel who viewed her social worker as, whilst consistent, a negative influence and indeed responsible for decisions which were not involving or agreed to by Rachel.



RACHEL'S STORY

As far as planning goes, I can recall...a lot of my past is actually very blurry 'cause I've been through a lot of stuff and compartmentalisation and all of that, but I have a memory of a massive conference and there was loads and loads of people that I didn't know who they were, and I was just...they were all talking about me and I was just, like, at one end of the table just looking at all these people thinking who are you all? Mm, everybody knows Rachel but I don't know who most of these people are.

And then my social worker walked in and sat down, and I remember feeling so angry towards this person because she was the one that used to ship me around all over the place, and it was the moment that I got put in care that I started with my criminal behaviour and I've just, kind of, like, lost my cool. I had a hot chocolate and I jumped on the table and I ran across the table and I threw it. And from there they just said no, she hasn't changed. She's obviously just...still crazy, and stuff like that. So they just literally carried on with the plans that they had before, just put me in a more secure environment.

There was no relationship with my social worker, and nobody was trying to have a relationship with me, and that's why I had so much hate towards them, because it's, like, my question was you don't know me and you've never had a conversation with me but you're so opinionated and you...you're the one making all the decisions about my life. So that was, like, really emotional for me, and that's, obviously, why I used to, obviously, not act appropriately and do things like throw chocolate around.



BEST PRACTICE PROJECT A

This example from Project A* shows the benefits of planning which starts inside custody, a consistent case worker and signposting to local services.

Daniel met his case worker in prison three times prior to his release. During these visits, the worker was able to hear about Daniel's background first-hand, and explain the details of

Project A's mentoring service. They agreed to work together, and completed the required paperwork.

As an active member of a well-established gang, Daniel had been referred to the project by the local multi-agency team targeting serious youth violence. He was deemed to pose a risk to the public and, upon release from prison, was forbidden to return to his home area.

Daniel had nowhere to live, and his local council were unable to offer him accommodation. When a charity found him a room in a shared house, he took it. It was miles away from anything he knew.

On the day of Daniel's release, his case worker met him at the prison gate. Daniel was not well travelled and, having moved prisons a few times during his sentence, didn't really know where he was. Daniel's case worker accompanied him to his first meeting with his new YOT.

Daniel and his case worker then walked around Daniel's new home town. They located the likely resources that Daniel would need including transport links, the post office, the job centre, the housing office and the police station. They bought Daniel some sheets and a quilt. Their next appointment was with the landlord, and Daniel signed his first tenancy agreement. After a bag of chips, the final stop was the supermarket where they bought basic crockery, a saucepan, a few utensils and enough food to see Daniel through the next few days.

During the first week, his case worker helped Daniel to organise his Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and housing benefit claims. They also opened a bank account for Daniel, so he could set up a direct debit for his service charges.

As part of his Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Order, Daniel met with his case worker twice a week for a few months. They also kept in regular contact by phone. They addressed conflict management and regularly discussed the negative influence of Daniel's old peer groups. Daniel is now enrolled in college where he is retaking his GCSEs. As far as his case worker knows, Daniel is not offending. They are now focused on getting Daniel some permanent accommodation and deepening his tentative local roots.

*The name of the project has been changed to maintain confidentiality.

A further difficulty for resettlement agencies is the recently introduced policy of moving prisoners to a resettlement prison in the final week or so of their sentence. This can mean that work done in the penal institution may come to nothing because the support worker loses touch with the prisoner at a crucial moment.

Those interviewed said that resettlement work needs to focus on raising the low aspirations of some young people while introducing some realism into the aspirations of others. Unless the young person is sufficiently motivated and the right services and resources are in place, there is a danger of them going back to the gang with which they got into the trouble that led to imprisonment. Post-release work can address issues around self-perception and identity, anger management, substance and/or alcohol misuse. The problem was summed up succinctly by one young respondent saying 'I've changed but the world hasn't'.

Beyond acknowledging individual difference it is important to recognise that maturity seldom comes at 18 or 20. Protracted adolescence seems to be a characteristic of many gang-involved young people and this is exacerbated by imprisonment and service providers have to be realistic about this. The Transition to Adulthood Alliance points to evidence from desistance research that 18-24 year olds are the age group most likely to desist and 'grow out of crime' and claim that developmental maturity is a better guide to someone's stage in reaching adulthood. For some, an 18th birthday can be a time of maximum risk and vulnerability, yet this is also the time when young people encounter changes to legislative frameworks and statutory expectations which are often characterised as more punitive as they move from YOS into probation services.

Too often, service providers are expecting young people to act like adults. Young people's support needs should be identified and negotiated with individuals at the point they are sentenced and, ideally, followed through by the same worker. Respondents felt that 'pathway planning'; breaking down the aspirations of prisoners into a series of steps can be extremely useful, particularly if they are mentored by someone who has taken those steps themselves. All respondents were agreed that sustained and consistent support was of paramount importance and that short-term commissioning should be avoided. This principle of effective engagement is described in the work of Carney's Community.



BEST PRACTICE CARNEY'S COMMUNITY

Carney's Community was set up in 2011 to support young people at risk of offending. Young people are referred to Carney's Community by YOTs, the police, probation, social services and schools. The service aims to support young people to move through the following different stages:

- 1 All young people have boxing sessions or drop-in activities as their start point (pre-contemplation).
- 2 Young people start to want to change and improve their lives (contemplation).
- 3 Young people agree a personal development plan which outlines how they will address their offending behaviour (preparation).
- 4 Young people work on their personal development (action).
- 5 Young people are referred to education, training and employment opportunities (maintenance).
- 6 It is highly likely that young people will have to go through the first four stages a number of times. Staff work with them until they are ready to sign up to another personal development plan (relapse).

In 2013, Carney's Community mentored 24 high-risk young people and outcomes were positive. Eight were either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, and they all gained or maintained housing. Of the 20 seeking education, training or employment, eight gained paid work, seven (re-)engaged in education and 11 engaged in volunteering. All of those with problematic family situations reported improvement. 17 reduced or stopped their offending.

Engagement and change take time. Short-term mentoring, delivered when an agency deems it necessary (and affordable) can undermine engagement. Carney's Community offers support which is consistent and not time limited.



AARON'S STORY

There are particular times when recently released young people are likely to relapse into criminality, especially if they have had to be relocated. Services and individual support need to be available when young people are most likely to feel lonely and isolated, often on Friday nights and at weekends. Respondents agreed that 'through the gate' is really important but felt it was often rhetoric rather than reality. For Aaron, being relocated upon release was a challenging time, during which he needed support.

The immediate time after release was very challenging but Aaron coped well with settling back into the community and his new area. However, as time went on and the practical issues were resolved, it became clear that leaving behind family, friends and his community was very difficult emotionally. Aaron's relationship with his long-term girlfriend had also broken down as a result of the move. Aaron had lost his support network of family and friends and spent a lot of time alone.

Although statutory services considered Aaron's friends as a negative influence, they were also the friends he had had since early childhood. During this period the support Aaron needed seemed similar to that required by someone who had been moved as part of witness protection. Aaron was prohibited from contacting his old friends as part of his licence, but also in terms of risk, and could not return home to see family.

After Aaron had been in the community for a few months a close friend was murdered in Aaron's home area and he was unable to return for the funeral or to be among friends to grieve due to the risk. Aaron became depressed during this period and emotional support was provided. At this time it was a daily challenge to keep Aaron in his new area and prevent him from returning to his old area and lifestyle. Aaron had, however, been assisted to try various hobbies and became happier when he discovered Muay Thai and joined a local club, and this also helped Aaron to stop smoking cannabis.

Extra support was provided on significant dates like Aaron's birthday and Christmas. These periods were very difficult as it highlighted the people and lifestyle that Aaron felt he had lost and made him question his commitment to his new area and life. Emotionally and mentally, relocating gave Aaron the chance of a fresh start but also meant loneliness and isolation.

It is often easy to forget that a life free from offending is not just about making practical changes although these are obviously essential. Not only did Aaron need accommodation and to start education from a beginner's level, he also had to adjust to a lifestyle that did not involve the power and status which he previously had.

Staffing

Youth workers involved in gang-desistance programmes in London interviewed by Pitts (2011) and the BYC research team point to the pressures upon previously gang-involved peer mentors (ex-gang-involved young people working as assistant youth workers in a gang-desistance programme). While on the one hand their previous notoriety means that they are readily accepted by, and influential with, their gang-involved peers, it is also the case that such credibility hinges upon their continuing association with the gang. This is partly because it is difficult to leave the gang without leaving the neighbourhood, but also because these gang members are often close friends with whom they have grown up or, indeed, their brothers or cousins. Youth workers observe that this can sometimes lead to a situation in which they are subject to pressure to ‘back up’ fellow gang members and this can be a particular problem if the ‘beef’ concerns an attack on a sibling or a close friend. The peer mentors confirm that in some, extreme, situations there is ‘no choice’.

” So we need to be one step ahead, and because of that what we do is, we routinely get feedback from the clients and the staff as to what we should be doing, and then we have to continuously innovate our process. But we also have to be wary that it only takes one mistake from any one of us and then that can make, you know, the project lose its credibility, like, you know, so, for example, working too closely with the police, or, for example, having an issue with a worker that starts reoffending and we’re not on top of it. It can just ruin the project’s credibility for either side and that’s something that we need to maintain.

Project manager

Agencies need to recognise that mentors can be drawn from the whole of society and that an ex-gang-affiliated mentor does not always make the best fit because one size does not fit all. Respondents felt that recruiting people with passion who could be positive role models, enabling young people to make sense of what it is that a woman or a man is meant to be is important. They emphasised the need for the right kind of support for workers who also needed to feel needed, wanted and cared for if they were going to do that for the young people. They pointed to the high level of burn-out if the agency did not ‘look after its staff’. Young people were clear that staff needed to demonstrate consistency and care if they were to build effective relationships with the young people.

” Because these are here all the time. These staff will sit down and speak to you on a level actually...like just general things, but they are asking you near enough every day. You can tell they are actually here to help young people. From what I can see this job is tiring for staff. Staff come here, they work, they get assaulted, they get spat on, they get bit just like...horrible like, the ways the staff get hurt, but they still come in the next day. They still come in two days after, they still come here and work, yet you might think of them being...well they might they are being...How do I put it, a dickhead, if you really want me to put it like that.

17 year old in secure children’s home

Persistence in reaching out is another quality appreciated by this group.

” She approached me in a more personal way. She even wrote with her own handwriting. Then I thought to myself she’s sending me stamps. See, these little things, it opens you up a little bit. She sent me stamps. She was, like, oh, any time, just message me or send me an email, give me a call. Here’s my number. When you’re released get in contact with me. So it’s a...she, obviously, kinda, built up that little...and I thought OK, yeah, she’s helping me. She’s sent me stamps, she’s constantly sending me letters. She cares. But normally people just send you one letter. If you don’t reply then you’ll just never...that’s the last of it.

21-year-old male released in 2014

Recognition that release from custody can be stressful and traumatic is highlighted in other BYC publications. The fact that support is needed during the resettlement process is also well established.

However, notwithstanding the need for statutory engagement as part of the licence, there is also a recognition on the part of young people we spoke to that sometimes they just want to be left alone. Being able to recognise these signs and hear these messages was deemed extremely valuable in development of the relationship.

” I’ll tell you why they don’t wanna engage, because I’ve felt like that myself. I’ve had someone telling me what to do for the last four years. Do I really want someone else telling me what to do again? Plain and simple. And the sooner that is understood the better. And you can’t say well they’ve got to because they...no, they don’t, because they’ve done their time.

You want to see your family and friends, but who you don’t want to see is a case worker. Sometimes you don’t wanna mentor...because it’s just, like...invasion into your life. It’s, like, well, when can I have my time? I’m free now. And that’s where a lot of failure comes forth, for those that don’t understand why prisoners seem very off-brushy once they get out.

Female project worker

At the focus groups professionals said that it was unrealistic to expect this work to be done by volunteers because volunteers could not deal with all the problems thrown up by this group. As well as measuring outcomes, there was also a feeling that services needed to find other ways to demonstrate effectiveness. It was felt that feedback from young people who had used the service should be taken into account, coupled with the recognition that relationships of trust are not developed overnight. One project manager identified these challenges thus:

Finding stable, sustainable sources of funding. At the end of the financial year, it’s a challenge not to be distracted from the central task of reaching and working with young people. Evidencing our processes, outcomes and outputs through viable evaluation and monitoring whilst minimising the impact that record keeping has on vital worker-client time.

The unhelpful nature of funding regimes and the late decision making in the awarding of contracts within new commissioning arrangements as part of the *Transforming Rehabilitation* agenda had also created significant service delivery uncertainties particularly with regards to staff contracts and renewal. Such uncertainties often means that the priority of building relationships with clients diminishes as staff shift the focus of their attention to the need to apply for new jobs or re-apply for their current posts.



**BEST PRACTICE
SOS PROJECT,
ST GILES TRUST**

One project which has been able to manage the difficulties identified on page 56 and make the necessary adaptations whilst establishing itself as a credible resettlement project for gang-involved young people is St Giles Trust's SOS Project in London.

On my first night in custody, I asked for help and was surprised that there was no support. Later I trained as a prison listener with the Samaritans. The more I learned, the more I became aware of myself. I saw things in the young people I was supporting that I didn't like in myself. Ironically when I had hard times after I was sentenced, people I'd trained came back and supported me. Fast forward to the end of my sentence. St Giles was working with a peer advisory model and they trained offenders in information, advice and guidance. The head of education and training and skills at my prison set up a meeting, and I talked to St Giles about my idea. I didn't have the solution, but I'd got a way of working with gang-affected young people. My ultimate goal was that offenders would not only support others but by a process of development could be seen as professionals.

Junior Smart, Founder of SOS

SOS started eight years ago. It is hosted and supported by St Giles Trust, and funded by a mixture of statutory funding, charitable trusts, private individuals and corporate supporters. It offers intensive support to young offenders, both in prison and in the community. Trained peer mentors deliver tailored support to help young people desist from crime – particularly gang-related crime. SOS clients are referred from a wide range of sources. Some are identified as 'gang nominals' by the police or safer community teams, some arrive via victim support or housing services.

SOS recruits from amongst those that have been through its doors as vulnerable young people. The majority of the staff on the project are trained ex-offenders or have first-hand experience of the criminal justice system. Once fully trained and qualified, clients volunteer on the team. They promote from within; if a vacancy arises, it is advertised internally.

The SOS team recognises and faces processes of change head on. They explain:

- 1** You've got the change that's happening for the client. As obstacles arise, we support them to avoid the traps of their 'old' repertoire. It's not as easy as saying, 'don't carry a knife'. You're frequently demanding that they reinvent their life, turn their back on things that had previously worked for them. We've worked with thousands of clients. This year we're on target to work with 600 young people. We don't close cases, and we answer our phones 24/7.
- 2** The support worker is also changing. Changes are never overnight, even for the workers. We provide a supportive environment to help staff to develop and overcome their fears and cope with adaptation. Their work with clients reinforces that change.
- 3** The third major change is organisational. We're responsive; the project's always evolving. We get feedback from clients and staff, and we innovate. The type of work we do can be pressured. You can be working with young people who are very entrenched and, hence, resistant to change. You can sit in multi-disciplinary meetings where each agency thinks their own perspective is paramount. You have to keep the needs of the young people at the heart of it. There are also issues of preserving project credibility, and understanding the changing nature of gangs and their activities.

Challenges on release

Respondents identified the following issues as the most challenging for gang-involved young people leaving custody:

1 Accommodation

For many gang-involved young people who cannot return home, the main issue is accommodation. Long-term, good-quality provision is required because an itinerant lifestyle makes the security of gang involvement more attractive. They are often reluctant to share and often need help with sustaining their tenancy. The restrictions imposed on recipients of JSA and housing benefits vis-à-vis earnings can be problematic. Jon's story on page 59 describes the arrangements which needed to be made to find safe accommodation for a young person who couldn't return home.

” Getting someone rehoused used to be a challenge, but it wasn't impossible. With housing stock at an all-time low, it's extortionate private renting. I get this kid accommodation, and he's keen to get a job. We do the sums, and once he's off housing benefit, into paid work, he needs a 25 grand a year job. And you think, 'have I set this young kid up to fail?'

Project worker

Programmes like Safe and Secure in London aim to relocate gang-involved young people who are at high risk from other gangs. This is difficult because the young person must either leave their family or their family must leave their home and, in doing so, cut many of their ties. The problem is compounded if the accommodation they are offered appears to be inferior to that they are being forced to leave. The Safe and Secure programme may involve whole family relocation and this can create enormous stress because family members are required to abandon their local community networks, education, employment etc. Many practitioners and young people themselves have stated that the thresholds for the programme are too high and unrealistic.

An Evening Standard article (Cohen, 2014) retold Leon's story and his attempts to become eligible for the Safe and Secure programme and to subsequently secure permanent housing via his local authority. There were a number of significant errors in the management of Leon's case including placing him in the same accommodation as three rival gang members. As a result of a breach whereby Leon was seen as associating with an old friend he received a letter from his local authority principal review officer stating 'That you have been stabbed over 20 times and the subject of a gun attack does not necessarily equate to you being vulnerable.' It concluded 'You do not have a priority need' and gave him a month to leave his temporary accommodation.

Difficulties also arise if the young person drifts back to their neighbourhood of origin because of feelings of loneliness and isolation, thus putting themselves at risk, or, conversely they settle into their new area and set up an outpost that enables their old gang to expand its drug-dealing territory.

Resettlement services and accommodation providers also need to take care of the cultural needs of their client group. Whilst access to faith-based services is available for most in custody, ensuring sensitive support is available post-release is important. The Date Palm Project is an example of just such an initiative (see p59).



JON'S STORY

In 2012, Jon was coming to the end of his detention and training order in a secure training centre. He had served two years for armed robbery and was due to be supervised on licence by the YOS on his release.

There were concerns about the high risk of harm to Jon on his release from custody as a result of his historical and current gang involvement. Intelligence from police and the Serious Youth Violence team suggested that there would be a serious risk to Jon's life if he were to return to his home borough and direct threats had been made to Jon and his family.

As Jon had turned 18 shortly before his release, securing statutory assistance with finding accommodation was complicated. Safe areas were identified and an assessment of Jon's needs was completed. Following discussions with various local authorities, a reciprocal agreement was put in place between Jon's home borough and a North London borough, far enough away from Jon's home to keep him safe. Jon was released, placed in temporary accommodation, and once details were finalised Jon moved into a supportive accommodation pathway.



BEST PRACTICE DATE PALM PROJECT

The Date Palm Project is an accommodation-based service offering a 'through the gate' service for young male Muslim ex-offenders. The service has been running for six months and has now worked with six individuals.

The service was first developed by chaplaincy imams at Feltham YOI and the National Zakat Foundation, alongside the Better Business Community Network who fund it. St Mungo's Broadway is the service delivery partner.

The chaplaincy at Feltham YOI and St Mungo's Broadway staff refer young men to the service and support them before they are released. The staff work with probation around the time of release, meeting young men at the gate and providing accommodation and ongoing support for 12 months.

The service aims to support its residents to leave their offending lifestyle behind and enter education, training and employment. It achieves this through what staff describe as:

The powerful combination of having a psychologically informed environment with faith aspects to help repair people emotionally and spiritually. The service continues to evolve to meet individuals' needs, and faces the daily challenge of changing clients' learnt behaviours and preconceptions, putting them in a position with a new set of coping strategies and a new found maturity to be able to choose the right path for themselves.

Date Palm Project manager

2 The role of families in supporting gang exit

As several other studies have found, young people tended to leave or distance themselves when they found a partner or became a parent (Fitzgibbon et al, 2013). While the young respondents said that they had reached the decision to quit on their own, they also said that family members, particularly their mothers and their sisters, helped them to do this. Parents sometimes tried moving house, or sending their children to another area, to prevent their children's involvement in local gangs. Some approached the police or children's services for help, with mixed results. Those who succeeded tended to relocate to another area and use voluntary or statutory welfare, and educational and vocational provision. Conversely, there are times when families do not support a young person's attempts to leave the area, as the statement below from a young man, prosecuted through joint enterprise proceedings as a result of a gang-associated stabbing, illustrates.

” Yeah like I have said to my mum ‘Oh I am planning on leaving [home city] and that’ and she is like. ‘Yeah. Yeah. Do what you have to do’ innit. But then on the other hand she is like ‘Well you will get itchy feet and you will just come back the same. Yeah, you will come back. You can’t stay up there’. Basically she is not saying yeah you do what you have to do innit. Your family is always here. It is only down the road, you know you come and visit. She is not like one of them. She is like ‘You’ll end up coming back’, you know like one of them, not like really give me a praise. You know what I am saying?

17-year-old male in custody

The researchers suggest that effective strategies must be attuned to local situations vis-à-vis gangs. They believe that there is a strong case for supporting beleaguered families with gang-involved young people as part of the *Troubled Families* programme, even where they fail to meet the strict eligibility criteria. They commend early intervention before a young person's *on road* (gang) lifestyle is established. They also suggest that their findings lend support to existing programmes aimed at strengthening parenting skills in families with an identified risk of gang involvement. It is crucial that services meet their statutory responsibilities, especially for those young people leaving custody who were previously looked after by the local authority.

” Parents are becoming younger now, and so you know, their dad's probably 30, they are 15 and so...So their dad is 30 he hangs about with all these gang-affiliated people, and because of who his dad is, or his dad has just done a long stretch, and because of who their dad is now, they have got the stripe. That's my dad. So we are dealing with the young people, but before we deal with the young people we have to deal with the families, mum, dad, even grandparents.

YOS worker

Often organisations have a role in helping both the gang-involved young man and the mother of his child come to some decisions for the best interests of their child. The case from St Michael's Fellowship on page 61 describes the intensity and complexity of undertaking this work and the range of skills required by practitioners to secure a positive outcome.



**BEST PRACTICE
ST MICHAEL'S
FELLOWSHIP**

Simon is 22 years old. Simon joined a gang at an early age and was excluded from his secondary school, at the age of 13, for seeking to recruit his fellow pupils into the gang. Simon has been arrested, charged, prosecuted and incarcerated for a variety of offences including possession of a bladed article, possession of an imitation firearm, attempted robbery, robbery and grievous bodily harm.

Simon left the gang in August 2012 after he survived an attempt on his life – during which he was stabbed nine times by members of a rival gang. He was relocated outside of the borough for a year and was employed as a construction apprentice.

Wendy is Simon's ex-partner and the mother of his child. During a failed attempt to enter the mother and baby unit to see Wendy, without her consent, Simon caused criminal damage and spent two weeks in custody. Upon release he was informed that he had lost his apprenticeship and that Wendy had been unfaithful. This led to numerous incidents of domestic violence, during which he subjected Wendy to a range of violence, aggression, vulgarity and threatening words and behaviours. Some of these incidents of domestic violence were committed in the presence of their child, which triggered a section 47 Child Protection Investigation. Wendy then obtained a non-molestation order against Simon. Simon breached the terms of the order and a warrant was issued for his arrest.

St Michael's Fellowship got involved to help Simon and Wendy address their issues and remain their daughter's primary caregivers.

Meetings, discussions, interactions and observations with Simon, Wendy, key workers and their child's social worker resulted in plans for Simon to receive or undertake the following:

- 1 One-to-one guidance and support from St Michael's Fellowship about being a father.
- 2 An anger management course
- 3 A domestic violence course
- 4 Contact with his child via St Michael's Fellowship's Saturday dads contact centre after successful completion of points 2 and 3. These sessions are structured and supervised to protect all the parties concerned.
- 5 A parenting course (with or without Wendy) after successful completion of points 2 and 3
- 6 Relationship counselling with Wendy
- 7 Assistance with becoming an apprentice again

St Michael's Fellowship had numerous one-to-one meetings and telephone conversations with education, health and social care and criminal justice professionals and liaised with a construction company. St Michael's Fellowship will then ask the relevant professionals to allow Simon to re-establish contact with his child at St Michael's Fellowship's Saturday dads contact centre.

Since St Michael's Fellowship's began working with Simon in late January 2014, he has taken full responsibility for all of the issues and incidents that have led him to this point. He has also fully engaged with the programme of intervention that has been designed to help him effect positive change.

3 Finance

For young people leaving penal institutions, money is usually a problem.

” Homeless, being released out of jail. I've got £53, that's all I was given. That's all I've got. £53. I saved up £20 extra from my canteen, I was supposed to be given that, but they didn't give it to me, because they wanted me to come back and get it. So I had £53. I am going to buy some food, so that's £10 probably gone. Buy a packet of cigarettes and a drink. £15 gone. I am left with 40 something pound and that to take me...Now I need travel to take me from A to B, from B to C and back to A again, so I need transport for the whole day. So I am going to be left with £30. I've got nothing in my pocket, housing is telling me they can't sort out nothing for me. Probation can't sort out nothing for me. Where am I going? There's no...I feel like you are set up, I told this to my probation officer, I feel this is a set up, for me. No matter how much I tried to sort out of my life and I try better my life, there's always going to be a chance that I am going back to jail.

23-year-old male released in 2014

Several practitioners suggested that the need for a resettlement pack containing basic essentials to survive for the first few days would be a significant and positive development. Such provision would relieve a lot of the stress and for some, the trauma of the actual release process. For gang-involved young people, the lack of financial support can be a problem that they resolve by returning to the gang and benefitting from its illicit activities.

” Money is power. Everyone says money rules the world, because we wouldn't be alive, we wouldn't have any clothes. Money rules everything. Everybody needs money in this world. Well it is not even though we did, we'd get money, we'd get greedy. But I used to get greedy and want more. So I would have a brand new nice phone, nice watch, whatever, but I still want that extra. I want that bike. I want that upgrade of that car and things like that. And that is what it is, it is greed. The more money you have got the more power you have got, that's how it is on the streets. And everyone wanted it. Everyone use to chase their dream, the chance to make money.

22-year-old male who had served four custodial sentences

Moreover, they may be indebted to older gangsters, possibly because of the loss of drugs when they were arrested, and this can only be resolved quickly by recourse to further criminality. Young people, when they arrive back in the community with little money may well think that they were better off before they went to prison and this is a disincentive to gang desistance.

” I've also gotta make so-and-so appointments. I'm lucky that these people give me back my travel money, but tomorrow I go to a job interview. You're not expecting the person at a job interview to give you back your money, but little does anybody know, [support worker] had to give me another form so I could go and get toilet roll from a food bank. People wouldn't think a little thing like toilet roll would be big news, but we're living in poverty and we live in England. People don't understand that.

24 year old released in 2011

4 Employment

After the disclosure of their criminal record finding secure employment can be difficult. The Ban the Box campaign led by the charity Business in the Community (BITC) highlights the negative ripple effect there is on society when employers ask questions about criminal records at the first point of the recruitment process. Nacro and BITC advise employers to ask such questions at a later, more appropriate stage in the recruitment process so that applicants are first assessed on their skills, qualifications and ability to do the job. This also gives applicants the opportunity to provide disclosure information to the employer in a way which better informs the employer's risk assessment.

” ...as soon as you put in you've got a criminal conviction, you can't even finish the application... and then go back, you refresh it, and you [click]...you say, 'no I haven't got one', and then it lets you carry on...you can't even get past that one initial stage...sometimes it's a bit hard. You feel like it's hard to progress.

Young woman released in summer 2014

The importance of having plans in place prior to release was made by both professionals and young people to whom we spoke. Planning for a career and mapping the pathway or steps required to achieve it should begin in custody, with the necessary educational opportunities being tailored towards the young person's end goal. Ensuring a structure to their day, by attending work or training was something young people recognised as helpful in distracting them from the temptation of returning to previous criminal activity.

” To be honest the only reason you join a gang is going to be for protection and money. Earn money. They are going to want money, everyone wants money. You have got to help, go through programmes and try to get them a job or an apprenticeship, it depends how old they are. A traineeship, anything, just try to get them on a path where they can eventually be earning money, and just get a job, and then try building their life from there. Because once you have got a gang-affiliated person, a place to live and hopefully a work place then I think that would be really the key for that person. Because that's the only reason I am in a gang. For protection and money.

17 year old in custody, due for release in March 2015



BEST PRACTICE CREATING POSITIVE FUTURES

Creating Positive Futures is located within New Horizon Youth Centre in Camden, North London. The service provides drop-in services, including accommodation advice and referrals, accredited education and training programmes, counselling and music production workshops. Staff work with young people on a one-to-one basis and through group work sessions.

Eddie worked with the education, employment and training team to write a CV and undertake training. He was found an apprenticeship after expressing an interest in construction and gaining his CSCS. However, he decided relatively early in the apprenticeship that this was not the path he wanted to pursue and quit after two months. A new apprenticeship was then secured in business skills. Eddie was provided with intensive support during this period to help him deal with housing benefits, JSA, budgeting, independent living, cooking and settling into a new area. Appointments were carried out in the community to ensure Eddie knew his way around.

Eddie is now in his second term at university studying for a business degree. He is working part time to help fund his studies.

The support from Creating Positive Futures started when Eddie was in custody and continued after his statutory support and licence period finished. Eddie worked with the same key worker throughout this time and built strong relationships with the other staff there. Eddie has passed his driving test and is continuing to build his life in the same North London borough, where he was relocated upon release, not because he has to, but because he wants to.

5 Licence conditions

Both young people and the professionals providing resettlement services were clear that the success of the resettlement process was predicated on the effectiveness of the multi-agency partnership responsible for supervising their licence conditions upon release. The Home Office MAPPA provide a national framework for assessing and managing the risk posed by serious and violent offenders. Police, prison and probation are responsible for the assessment and management of risks posed by relevant sexual and violent offenders.

Some organisations which operate a multi-agency gangs-desistance programme are able to ensure a suitable level of coordination. For example, the Integrated Gang Management Unit (IGMU) in Manchester has its own specialist gangs MAPPA and meets once a month specifically to talk about the release of known 'gang nominals'.

Many local authorities will have their own risk assessment and management procedures. However, the research team heard mixed accounts of how well these arrangements were working, as this respondent indicates:

” The day I come out, I went to probation in [borough]. After I finished probation I went to housing to try. They told me go to the housing association, because they can't give me accommodation from the council, I didn't have anywhere to sleep in. I went to the housing association, as soon as I got to the housing door I see the person who was my partner, who used to be. His little brother just got rushed, he got beaten up, he is bleeding and that. He said 'I got beaten up by people. There's a war going on'. I am thinking, 'I didn't want to meet you or your brother, any of those people in that area. And people are going to know that I am out'. I might be involved automatically into this thing, now I have to look, watch at my back.

20 year old released in 2012

Young people interviewed for the purposes of this report said it often proved difficult to comply with licence conditions, especially those which include Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) or prohibit them from entering particular areas or associating with particular people. This was echoed in the recent Young Review (2014) which heard from prisoners who felt that living a normal life back in their communities could put them at risk of breaching their licence conditions.

Professionals gave examples of entire families being evicted from their homes by local authorities because their son had breached his licence. One respondent described this as 'ethnic cleansing'. On the other hand, with sufficient resources and a well-integrated multi-agency partnership, positive outcomes can be achieved for the young person, the victim/s and the wider community, as was the case with Joe whose IGMU intervention is outlined opposite.



BEST PRACTICE INTEGRATED GANG MANAGEMENT UNIT

Joe, 23, was serving a 116-month standard determinate sentence for assaults with intent to rob. He was assessed as presenting a high risk of serious harm to the public and rival gang members. Whilst strenuously disputed by Joe and others close to him, he was identified as someone associated with urban street gangs (USG). This view was shared by key agencies responsible for his supervision. The Integrated Gang Management Unit (IGMU) began working on Joe's case more than 12 months before his release.

The IGMU convened a meeting. Attendees included a senior probation officer, a specialist probation officer, a social worker, a family support worker, an interventions worker and an education, training and employment (ETE) specialist. Victim liaison, Neighbourhood DI and MAPPA support were also present. The points below outline what was discussed, agreed and achieved.

Key themes discussed

- Joe's association with well-known USG members
- Poor financial and ETE prospects
- Lack of suitable accommodation
- Joe was suffering significant levels of anxiety
- Traumatized victim with anxieties about Joe's imminent release from prison
- High community interest in the case with risk of adverse publicity

Action plan agreed

- Place Joe in an approved premises and arrange extensive control measures
- Refer Joe to local specialist mental health provider for USG-involved offenders
- Arrange appointments with the IGMU's ETE officer

Outcomes achieved

Since Joe's release in October 2014:

- He has not breached any conditions of his licence
- He has completed the Approved Premises placement successfully
- There is no new intelligence of USG association
- He has obtained part-time employment as a waiter
- He has engaged in a work programme to obtain qualifications
- He has accessed mental health support
- He has engaged well with probation interventions
- Safe accommodation was eventually provided out of the immediate vicinity

Summary

The IGMU is a well-established multi-agency team with a high level of expertise around USG work. Barriers are multiple when leaving custody, and even more so in the case of USGs. Some agencies can be risk averse but the IGMU will 'take a risk to manage a risk' because their shared understanding provides confidence whilst remaining risk aware.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the period of this investigation, the research team has discovered some excellent resettlement practice for meeting the needs of gang-involved young people. However, the tensions and challenges within the criminal justice system, and particularly within the secure estate often render these initiatives less effective than they have the potential to be. For example, uncertainty about funding can distract staff from delivering their services because staff turnover gets in the way of effective multi-agency planning. Recognising these difficulties, research indicates that organisations might usefully consider the following framework as a basis for the development of a comprehensive gang intervention programme.

The key components of community based gang-desistance programmes

In his evaluation of three London gang-desistance initiatives, Pitts (2011) sketched out 11 key features of an optimal gang-desistance programme:

- 1 It would target gang-involved children and young people utilising a **'Traffic Light' Risk Assessment Instrument** to establish the depth, nature and risks posed by and to the young person. This would enable the programme providers to develop a range of interventions of the right type, intensity and duration. To succeed, however, all the relevant agencies, schools, and local residents would need to be involved, because some 'serious players' may be unknown to statutory agencies.
- 2 It would have an **Outreach Function**, usually pursued by street-based youth workers skilled in making and sustaining contact with 'hard-to-reach' groups (Crimmens et al, 2004), to draw them into the programme.
- 3 It would have an intensive **Group work Programme** which focused upon the development of alternative routes out of gang involvement and 'leadership' training. The effects of these programmes would be maximised if they had one or more residential elements which took participants to an unfamiliar setting where they were required to engage in unfamiliar group activities.
- 4 It would have a **Casework Function** in which criminal justice, youth work and/or social welfare professionals worked with the young person and their family to support involvement in the group work programme, address family problems and (re-)establish links with school, training, employment and/or relevant social welfare agencies.
- 5 It would establish a **Presence and a Base in a Gang-affected Neighbourhood** and allow continuing contact with gang-involved young people beyond the life of a particular intervention.
- 6 It would provide continuing practical and emotional support in the form of **Mentors, 'Buddies'** and/or a **Drop-in** function.
- 7 It would have access to the services of **Education, Training and Employment Specialists** who would work with gang-involved young people, to maximise their skills and knowledge and effect realistic choices about their futures, as well as with local employers, colleges and universities to open up alternative legitimate pathways for these young people.
- 8 It would have access to the services of a specialist **Housing Professional** who could, if necessary, enable young people under threat to move to suitable, and suitably supported accommodation in another area.
- 9 It would have a **Mediation Team** that would keep contact with all local gangs, and 'crews', enabling it to intervene to defuse inter-gang conflict and thereby reduce tit-for-tat violence.
- 10 As mentioned above, it would also have a **Through the gate Function** involving regular visits to gang-involved young people in YOIs or prison by project staff in order to draw them back into the project/programme on their return, which is often a point at which violence erupts.

- 11** As well as providing the services and resources outlined above, it would also have a dedicated **Girls and Young Women's Intervention Team** because research suggests that intervention with gang-involved girls and young women should contain a number of gender-specific elements (Cousineau, 2009; Miller, 2009). These include:

targeted prevention with girls and young women who, while not actively involved in gang crime 'hang out' with gang members. Research suggests that girls and young women may do this for as much as a year, before making a commitment to join (Miller, 2001)

harm reduction, including the construction of 'bad date' databases, supportive police protection, HIV prevention, needle exchange, STD testing, street outreach and the provision of emergency shelters

crisis intervention: which takes the form of outreach work and spans mental health and suicide prevention services (Chatterjee, 2006).

Recommendations

- 1** Resettlement work with gangs should build upon the principles of effective resettlement with young people developed within and around the criminal justice system.
- 2** Where an imprisoned young person is gang involved, provision in the form of funding for additional staff should be made available so that workers who know them can keep in contact with them and their families whilst in custody and liaise with the relevant agencies and services in order to develop and implement a realistic resettlement plan.
- 3** Funding should be made available to support the young person from day one of their sentence and where necessary, beyond the end of the licence period. This will be particularly important for gang-involved young people who are relocated. ROTL should be used to allow the young person to familiarise themselves with their new surroundings and service providers.
- 4** Agencies endeavouring to establish contact with imprisoned gang-involved young people should personalise the intervention; sending any literature with a handwritten letter and enclosing a self-addressed envelope to encourage the young person to write back. The sender of the letter should visit the young person inside at least once before release and become the 'go to' resettlement worker liaising with the relevant agencies and services in order to develop and implement a realistic resettlement plan.
- 5** Workers from gang-desistance programmes could also deliver Good Lives (Ward, 2015) programmes in custody and outside, that address violence and the trauma experienced by many gang-involved young people and/or programmes designed to empower young people to take control of their own lives and exercise agency. Such programmes should focus not only on the individual within the gang but also on the gang within its social field.
- 6** All too often educational provision in prison establishments is offered on a 'one size fits all' basis which suits nobody, yet the research indicates that relevant educational programmes can facilitate positive resettlement. It would follow that educational and vocational provision in prison should be based upon the young people's level of attainment, learning needs and aspirations. This would mean teaching young people in smaller groups but, in view of the fact that 'one size fits all' provision tends to foster disruption and violence, this would be a sound investment.
- 7** As a matter of urgency, those responsible for the secure estate need to find ways of reducing the high levels of violence which is evident in the institutions which accommodate gang-involved young people. Research on the impact of the different placement strategies is urgently needed. The use of confinement which mitigates against attendance at education or gang-desistance programmes should be discouraged. Additionally, appropriate mental health screening and support need to be available.

- 8** Decisions about relocation need to be made earlier so that services which are to provide accommodation, education, training etc. can be identified and the young person can use ROTL to begin the resettlement process. Agencies should ensure the necessary support in the form of a key worker who can offer a drop-in service and introductions to key professionals, volunteers or peer mentors in relevant recreational, educational and vocational services. The support should be available out of hours and pay particular attention to significant dates/times which may create difficulties or isolation for the young person.
- 9** Recognising that many gang-involved young people lack academic qualifications and some struggle with literacy and numeracy, linking them into relevant and supportive educational, training or employment facilities on release, which 'start where they are' and build upon what has already been undertaken in custody, will be important. This will also be true for those with qualifications who could, with support, enter further and higher education.

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