


A black and white photograph of a hand holding a knife, with the blade pointed upwards. The hand is positioned on the right side of the frame, and the knife is held in a way that the blade is clearly visible.

# Who is my neighbour?

A black and white photograph of a hand holding a knife, with the blade pointed downwards. The hand is positioned on the left side of the frame, and the knife is held in a way that the blade is clearly visible.

a church response  
to social disorder  
linked to gangs,  
drugs, guns and  
knives



# ‘Who is my neighbour?’

A Church Response to Social Disorder linked to Gangs,  
Drugs, Guns and Knives

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# Foreword by Rt Revd Dr James Jones

Liverpool is a city where people laugh with you when you laugh and weep with you when you cry. It is a city acquainted with grief. We have wept over James Bulger, Rhys Jones and Anthony Walker. When I was asked to write a foreword to 'Who is my neighbour?', I shared it with some colleagues who work and live in areas where there are gangs and guns, drugs, knives and racism. One of them told me a story which seemed to say it all and be a better preface than I could ever write. So with the author's permission, here it is.

## **A story – who is the priest here?**

I was invited to meet a government minister at a special unit for children excluded from secondary education. The minister asked the professionals from the various agencies what work they were doing. Many spoke up. Some were very committed to their work and obviously cared deeply about working with damaged, angry or difficult young people. Some tried to justify themselves by saying how worthwhile their projects were. They wanted to impress and be in the running for the next round of grants. One participant – a policeman who worked with young people in secondary schools – related how some lads had owned up to smashing windows at a bus depot.

They confessed to the policeman because they felt remorse, rather than showing off about it. This in itself is a miracle – there is deep mistrust between the community and police, between youth and authority figures. I immediately saw how the real priest in that situation was not me, dressed smartly for the minister in my clerical collar, but the policeman. He then related how, rather than put these young people into the judicial system, he had said to the lads, "come on let's go down to the depot and sort this out."

So they went down and a punishment was sorted out. The young men were put to work cleaning up the broken glass and agreed to pay towards new windows. And so the policeman acted as confessor and arranger of absolution. The young men were freed of their burden of guilt and given back their dignity.

Some background is needed here to make sense of the story. This policeman has been freed up to work with kids in schools. They already knew one another. He is from working class roots, once a choir boy, and has, in the true sense of the phrase, 'a heart' for young people of the community.

I commend this report into social disorder to you and ask you to pray with me. The image that has constantly accompanied me during my ministry both in Hull and Liverpool is that of Jesus standing outside the city weeping and through his tears pleading, "If only you knew the things that make for peace".

There is no doubt in my mind that through the prayers of faithful people living and believing in areas abandoned by others, people will find that there is a God who loves them, who has not forsaken them. The cruel fact of deprivation is that most people suffer from low self-esteem. The only antidote is to know that someone believes in you. Those who stay do, by their very presence, signal belief in the ones who remain.

The Rt. Rev. James Jones  
Bishop for Liverpool

*“Over the last two years in inner-city Birmingham there has been a craze to affiliate to postcodes. The two main gangs in the district of Nechells have varying levels of involvement, with young people in the lower ranks trying to establish their links by splattering the gang’s name on their social networking web pages. At the highest levels, members are involved in organised crime and drug dealing; essentially a ‘business’ with specific recruitment needs. Young people in the lower levels just want to be in the gang and some have invented rights of passage to join.*

*Opposing gangs use the Internet to have aggressive and threatening conversations online: the relative safety of a computer screen gives young men freedom to vent their feelings. I think the use of sites like Internet messenger MSN increase the potential for violence because they are inciting anger and reasons to fight. Without the Internet there would be very little, if any communication between gang members. Digital music is a key element of gang rivalry, whereby original tunes and rhymes channel the energy, creativity, skills and enthusiasm youngsters hold dear. As youth workers we are invited into the lives of this potentially volatile and explosive subculture.”*

John Street, director of free@last



Lads on a weekend residential found this sign and insisted on being photographed.  
Photo credit: Worth Unlimited



# Introduction

This report is an expression of our churches' deep concern about negative gang-related social disorder and violent crimes; their effects upon society at large, particularly the young; and the perspectives of the churches on and contributions to finding solutions. The main tools<sup>1</sup> of negative gang activity are drugs, guns, and knives; the use of which has resulted in the maiming and tragic loss of many young lives, long jail sentences for the convicted perpetrators and the destabilisation of urban communities. But this phenomenon does not occur in a vacuum, its causes are complex and are linked to wider social issues.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, this report is interested in the social, economic, political and environmental issues that provide the context within which gang-related social disorder and violent crimes occur. Addressing such complex context requires a holistic approach that considers both causes and effects if we are to uncover a message of faith, hope, and love of neighbour.

The report aims to quantify and value the contribution of the churches in addressing gang-related social disorder, reveal gaps in thinking and provision and provide churches with guidelines of good practice. It also aims to identify partnership opportunities to better address the issue. It was commissioned by the Enabling Group of Churches Together in England (CTE)<sup>3</sup> and prepared by the Secretary of Minority Ethnic Christian Affairs.<sup>4</sup> As a national ecumenical instrument, CTE has a role in helping the Church make an effective contribution to the search for solutions to gang-related social disorder. In commissioning this report CTE recognises that although this issue is sometimes presented as a 'Black problem', gang-related disorder is a challenge of national proportions impacting all communities, particularly urban communities. One contributor to our discussions pointed out that "this need for information and for strategic intervention represents a massive opportunity for CTE in the context of national programs."<sup>5</sup> Churches and Christian-led initiatives are already playing crucial roles in addressing these difficult issues; however, to date, there has been no national scoping of what is currently being done. During the preparation of this report Premier Radio published 'Church Consultation on Violent Crime' in association with the Metropolitan Black Police Association.

Gang-related crime is of growing national concern. Last year street violence claimed the lives of 26 teenagers in London. Recent research published by NCH, the children's charity, shows that as many as 29% of young people are affected by gun and knife crime and 36% are worried about gangs in their area. The paper calls for greater recognition of the extent to which young people are the victims of crime; improvements in their access to structured activities each week; young people to have a say in shaping their local communities; and the safeguarding of services that engage the most vulnerable young people and communities through

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<sup>1</sup> *The Witness* album 'Foundations for Life: Mentoring through Music', track No.1 'Tooled up for school.'

<sup>2</sup> Black Radley, *Birmingham Reducing Gang Violence* (BRGV2) Strategic Framework Draft v3.6, 12 October 2007.

<sup>3</sup> The research and report was commissioned at CTE's Enabling Group meeting in Leeds in March 16-17, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Churches Together in England (CTE) encourages and supports ecumenical relationships between the churches in England and works with churches and ecumenical agencies further afield. The Enabling Group is constitutive of the members, and is the General Meeting of the charity 'Churches Together in England'. Minority Ethnic Christian Affairs (MECA) encourages and supports ethnic minority churches to participate in the ecumenical process.

<sup>5</sup> Bishop Wilton Powell in a letter written after the July 2007 presentation of initial findings.

sustainable funding.<sup>6</sup> The publication of 'Who is my neighbour?' comes at a time of heightened awareness of the need to give young people a voice and greater prominence in planning and funding at both local and national levels.

### **Methodology**

The primary source for this report is a questionnaire (see Appendix 2) that was distributed electronically through CTE channels via its website, County Ecumenical Officers and MECA contacts with church headquarters and agencies. Questionnaires were sent out over a six-week period beginning mid-April 2007 asking respondents:

1. What are your perceptions of the extent of the phenomenon of social disorder and violent crimes linked to gang-activity involving drugs, guns and knives?
2. What do you feel are the factors feeding it?
3. What is your church/agency doing to address it?
4. What other initiatives are you aware of?
5. What more do you think could or should be done?

Over 60 questionnaires were returned from a wide cross-section of England, including Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Cheadle (Staffordshire), Dorchester, Felixstowe, Grimsby, Leeds, Leigh-on-Sea (Essex), Lichfield, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Mere (Wiltshire), Middlesex, Mitcham (Surrey), Nottingham, Powys, Reading, Shipley (Yorkshire), Skegness, Southampton, Southsea (Portsmouth), Stoke-on-Trent, Stratford-upon-Avon, Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton. The proportion of respondents living in major cities identified as 'urban' areas was approximately 60%, which is considerably higher than those living in large towns, 'suburban' dwellers (20%), and those living in small towns and villages, 'rural' dwellers (20%). For the purposes of this report, the term 'suburban' includes places such as Brighton and Hove, Portsmouth and Southampton, all of which experience some incidences of disorder.

In addition to the questionnaires mentioned above, this report draws on the perspectives of representatives from the Church, the government and the police who attended a consultation meeting on 19 July 2007 to receive and discuss initial findings from the research questionnaires. This meeting was instrumental in extracting the expert opinions of these professionals working in strategic positions, complementing the practical views of respondents to the questionnaires. Several new and insightful contributions were made and added to the research at this juncture. Contributions were also made by the Reference Group for Minority Ethnic Christian Affairs (MECA) at meetings in June and September 2007, encouraging MECA's Secretary to highlight examples of effective work being undertaken by the churches as models of good practice. An Enabling Group meeting in Manchester from 14 -15 September 2007 contributed further insights. Finally, Dr Keith Hebden of Queen's Foundation, Birmingham provided theological reflection and Dr Sophie Hebden compiled the report.

This report draws upon an extensive variety of organisations and individuals and their views. Mainstream churches and ecumenical bodies are represented here along with Black-led and Black majority churches and organisations; this latter group constituting approximately one third of respondents to the questionnaires. From whatever tradition, denomination or stream, the voices heard in 'Who is my neighbour?' are those reflecting the wider church in England with a mission of regeneration and hope for our world through faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ. This report comes to challenging conclusions about the role of gangs, the renewal of neighbourhoods and the theological and ideological assumptions that need to be addressed for us to move forward together.

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<sup>6</sup> 'Step inside our shoes': Young people's views on gun and knife crime, NCH, the children's charity, 17 April 2008.

### Redeeming the neighbourhood

The story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25 – 37) reminds the Church to always examine its religious and social prejudices. The twist in the tale is in finding that, when leaders let us down, it is the outcaste who ‘knows nothing of God’s temple’ who shows us the kingdom of God. When we think of gangs, we think of communities where belonging is strongly linked to neighbourhood: ‘postcoding’ and ‘turf’-based gang violence show this to be the case. To love our neighbour as ourselves can be translated to love those in the next district as ourselves. At the same time, love of and loyalty to the immediate local community is hardest for those who cannot choose their neighbours. While this report is an exercise in listening to the churches and other adult professionals, it seeks to highlight the need to listen to and learn from today’s Samaritans, whoever they may be, and to ask what it means to be a true neighbour.

Missiologists in Britain are negotiating the reality of an increasingly consumerist and commuter oriented approach to being Church. Mobility continues to be linked to prosperity, eroding the tradition of localism. It also means inner-city Churches tend to be commuter Churches.<sup>7</sup> As with all cultural shifts, the onus is with the Church to decide whether to go with the flow of changing values or adopt a counter-cultural approach that more closely mirrors the values of Jesus<sup>8</sup> and break down barriers of mistrust and misunderstanding.<sup>9</sup> In this case the counter-cultural approach would align the Church with the poor and provide a more effective base for listening and transforming the community.

The Church’s involvement in social action is not new and has a clear biblical and theological rationale. Jesus’ ministry sets the tone of hope and a brighter future for people in trouble by his announcement that he had come to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to oppressed captives, and to give sight to the blind.<sup>10</sup> The Gospels describe how in Jesus’ ministry, the power of God was at work as he fed the hungry, gave sight to the blind, included the excluded, and proclaimed his mission to those who needed a physician, rather than to those who were well. Mark’s Gospel describes how Jesus included and valued children in a way which was alien to his culture and to ours: “People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’”<sup>11</sup> First century Palestinian children were not used to being taken seriously: in a patriarchal

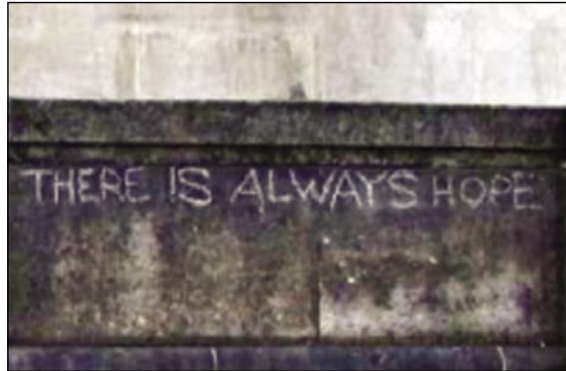


Photo credit: Banksy

and violent society their rights were few. But Jesus saw children as holding the key to the kingdom of God, and from whom adults must learn.

<sup>7</sup> Church of England’s Mission and Public Affairs Council, *Mission-shaped Church: Church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context*, London: Church House Publishing, 2004, pp. 2 – 8 and John B Thomson, *Church on Edge? Practising ministry today*, London: DLT, 2004, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Jeanne Hinton and Peter B. Price, *Changing communities: Church from the grassroots*, London: CTBI, 2003, p. viii.

<sup>9</sup> Saul Alinsky, *Reveille for radicals*, New York: Vintage, 1969, p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> Luke 4 v 18.

<sup>11</sup> Mark chapter 10 verses 13-15 (NIV).

In seeking to build God's kingdom, today's church therefore has little option but to be missiologically committed to the social, economic, political and spiritual liberation and development of the people, and in particular, the young. Editors of the anthology 'Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal' recall the manner in which the Church, over the years, has engaged in social and political reform, the alleviation of poverty, education provision and more.<sup>12</sup> The search for missiological relevance in the face of the perennial social needs of society is further illustrated in the Faith in the City Report which studied inequality, its causes and possible cures in Britain. This report was a significant development for churches in Britain who were and are continuing to grapple with inner-city issues. Faith in the City spoke not only to the churches, but to the government and the nation.<sup>13</sup>

But whilst there is a long tradition of missiological engagement with social issues, we know that the church has not always remained true to its ideals of liberation. It has sometimes been guilty of perpetrating or being complicit in oppressing the very people it has a mission to protect and liberate, even using her welfare campaigning and care as a platform for political advancement of religion. Through its complicity in the enslavement of Africans during the so-called Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, parts of the church tended away from its liberating role, becoming as much part of the problem as eventually part of the solution. Only belatedly were voices raised in denunciation of that vile practice. And particularly since the 1960s, the voices of the advocates of Liberation and Black theologies have reminded the Christian church of its calling and divine mandate. Latin American theologian Leonardo Boff, for example, states that the kingdom of God is about people, and is a symbol of the realisation of a utopia cherished in human hearts, that of total human and cosmic liberation.<sup>14</sup> From the African-American context, James Cone states simply that the starting point in Black theology is the liberation of the oppressed.<sup>15</sup> Cone further argues that based on the missiology of Jesus, the church of Jesus Christ is a people called into being by the power and love of God to share in his revolutionary activity for the liberation of 'man'.<sup>16</sup>

God's mission in this country is inextricably linked to finding solutions for alleviating the economic, political, social and spiritual pressures bearing down upon people's lives. The challenges facing us in our country's urban areas demand that the churches take seriously the commission to be salt (preservative, purifier, seasoning) and light (illuminator, revealer), in the world<sup>17</sup>. In these settings, practically all are victims of their circumstances, with limited choices. The uniqueness of the Church's role in bringing liberation to people's lives lies in its faith in a transcendent God, and its sense of vocation to the cause of liberation. This encourages us to look beyond the apparent to deeper, often concealed, sources of bondage and oppression. None of this can be done, however, without intelligence, hence the imperative for research to uncover people's perceptions, the facts about what is happening and the hopes people in urban areas in Britain have for a brighter future.

### **Redeeming 'Gang'**

A key role of Christian theology is that of redemption. This often calls for counter-cultural thought and action and a willingness to deconstruct and reconstruct commonly held views. Such is the case with the term 'gang', which has the potential to hijack the redemptive process unless it is demystified, deconstructed and reconstructed. "The word gang conjures up stereotypical images that are misleading at best and destructive at worst. Certainly not all groups of young

<sup>12</sup> John Wolffe (ed), *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal*, SPCK, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> *Faith in the City: A call for Action by Church and Nation*, Church House Publishing, 1985.

<sup>14</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: a Critical Christology of our Time*, SPCK, 1980, p. 63.

<sup>15</sup> James Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Harper Collins, 1975, p. 163.

<sup>16</sup> James Cone, *Black Theology*, Harper & Row, 1989, p. 63.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew chapter 5 verses 13-16.

people are violent, gun-carrying drug dealers.”<sup>18</sup> Put simply, the word ‘gang’ needs to be redeemed. A gang may be described as young “men and women who form a social group based on friendship, locality or family ties.”<sup>19</sup> This definition can be readily juxtaposed with Jesus’ twelve-man group of followers, which, it could be argued, was a gang by another name. As social beings, young people naturally group or cluster: a gang can provide them with a sense of belonging, personal worth and safety from abusive family members. That we come together is not remarkable and says little of purpose or intent; it is the actions of a group that define it. As Robert Beckford points out, some “contemporary urban groups are made problematic by their association with drug-centred criminal activity and increased use of firearms and knives”.

The challenge we face therefore, is not one of preventing young people from forming and belonging to social constructs we call gangs, it is to create the environment that helps them to use their individual and group strength, ingenuity, and political unrest for missiological ends. It is important to note that young people, including Black young people, do not have an innate or pathological predisposition towards violence. Neither are gang activities, violent crime involving drugs, guns and knives inevitable paths that young people take. Social, economic and political conditioning is, we believe, at the core of this phenomenon. Nurture, not nature, is what is believed to be at work here, and the Church must fully engage, refusing to stereotype or oversimplify the issues, as together we tackle the phenomenon of negative gang-related social disorder and violent crimes.

Jesus’ question, ‘Who is your neighbour?’ and his command to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’ will not be answered through funding applications, preaching traditional moral values that young people have found wanting, or reliance on the wisdom of experts. Jesus’ apocalyptic warning about how we treat the stranger among us in Matthew chapter 25 adds a renewed imperative to the mission of God in the inner-city. If we recognise violent gang-culture as developing out of economic deprivation, then the judgement of sheep and goats reminds us that gangs are both a sign of God’s presence and his judgement on our care for a neighbour in need.

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<sup>18</sup> Marshall et al., *Rationalisation of current research on guns, gangs and other weapons: Phase 1*, 2005, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Beckford, *God and the Gangs*, London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2004.

# Executive summary

This report is an exercise in listening to the churches and professional organisations, but it also highlights the need to listen to and learn from young people, the buried treasure in our communities. In the parable of the buried treasure, a man sold all his possessions to buy a field where the treasure was buried. Jesus likened this story to the kingdom of God: God is glorified when we sacrifice all (Matt 13: 44). Similarly, some of the recommendations in this report will involve change, challenge and great sacrifice to ask and discover what it means to be a true neighbour in our urban communities.

Research in the form of questionnaires and consultation sessions showed that church members from the various traditions and denominations in England are deeply concerned about social disorder linked to gang activity involving drugs, guns and knives. Many church members live within communities affected by violence, but even those whose neighbourhoods are mildly affected or unaffected by gang activity and violent crime perceive it as a high, serious or growing problem for inner-cities and are engaged with the issues.

The Church is aware of the role that family breakdown has in fuelling violent gang behaviour and has identified lack of fathering and poor parenting among other contributing factors. The most commonly identified factor fuelling social disorder was easy access to drugs and alcohol and problems of addiction. Lack of moral conscience or guidance, and lack of discipline in the home also featured prominently among questionnaire responses. Many felt that communities lack unity and organisation, identifying segregation of cultures and generations, racism, influx of people from different ethnic backgrounds, and social and community disintegration as contributors to gang violence. Church members were aware of the influence of peer group pressure on young people and the importance of close role models, particularly the importance of fathers. A large number of respondents said "lack of respect" was a problem, and many, either explicitly or implicitly, suggested that the government carries responsibility for doing something about the problem, such as providing funding for youth services, setting up new initiatives, raising levels of welfare payments, and increasing the number of police. This report makes specific recommendations for the government and the police regarding the perceptions and needs expressed by the Church (see pages 41-42).

Lacking among questionnaire responses, however, were explicit references to the effects on young people of violent behaviour modelled in the home, and exclusion from school, which, research suggests, can have a role in encouraging violent gang behaviour. Among the responses there was an emphasis on curbing disruptive behaviour, and the perception that gang members are morally deficient. The recommendations of this report could help churches address these perceptions through more direct engagement with young people and the local community.

This report reveals the broad range of initiatives that churches are involved in to tackle social disorder. Most commonly, these take place in partnership with other agencies. The Church is helping to bridge the divide between young people and authorities through organising community discussion forums with MPs and the police. Partnerships with schools may help tackle low academic achievement and job prospects, and respondents also identified after school clubs, drop-in advice centres and training and education schemes whose provision includes careers advice for young people and conflict resolution for youth workers. Church members are particularly aware of, or involved in, initiatives to tackle the

problems of easy access to drugs and alcohol, and problems of addiction. Respondents identified a large number of drop-ins, rehabilitation centres, hostels, advice, mentoring and counselling services. A quarter of respondents knew of activities or facilities for young people such as youth groups and sports facilities. Counselling, advice and mentoring services focus both on young people involved in gangs and the victims of crimes.

Areas where respondents felt the Church should reflect and focus its energies include listening to young people and building relationships on young people's terms, namely, listening and valuing their views. This will build self-esteem and self-worth, which many respondents felt young people lack. Listening and engaging with young people could also help address the needs for better community cohesion and empowerment of young people. Some felt the Church should better support mentoring and counselling efforts, and others felt that it should speak out more boldly about faith on the political stage. This report found an overreaction to the perception that boredom fuels gang-related social disorder, with the Church concentrating perhaps too much energy on clubs and activities to this end.

Many respondents believe that the Church should make more of multi-agency partnerships. They expressed the need for professional training to better equip volunteers, as well as the need for greater continuity of funding for initiatives to tackle social disorder linked to gang activity. Respondents identified the need to support parents and carers so that they are in a position to provide guidance and discuss values with children and develop their parenting skills. Churches should also consider their role as peacemakers in the community, and promote community organisation, which in itself reduces crime in poor neighbourhoods.<sup>20</sup>

Among its recommendations for the Church, this report suggests that church bodies and leaders encourage members to remain in, and move into, deprived local areas – only then will they be in a position to really understand the issues that young people face, and perhaps be able to offer help, support and positive opportunities. We suggest that churches seek to engage with voluntary groups and businesses in their area, starting with a prayer strategy. This would involve asking what they would like you to pray for. Rather than seeing government support as imperative for services and schemes, encourage the wider community to take ownership and provide financial support. Youth groups and clubs should focus on developing the skills and confidence of young people through serving the community. A key challenge for such groups is to find ways in which young people can explore biblical narrative and express their spirituality. Be creative together with the use of symbols for faith.

In researching this report we found that churches are eager to learn from young people, to open church doors to the community, to promote peace, integration and community organisation in deprived areas, and to empower young people and find the kingdom of God within them. The intractable nature of negative gang activity and violent crime linked to drugs, guns and knives means we need to be committed to view this as a long-term investment. These problems do not have any quick fixes, but diligent, prayerful and strategic working between young people, families, authorities and the churches will help secure a better community for us all.

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<sup>20</sup> Elliot, D.S., *Youth Violence: An overview*, Boulder: Regents of the University of Colorado, 1994.

# Part 1:

## Perceptions of the level of gang-related social disorder

*What are your perceptions of the level of disorder linked to gang-related activity?*

The detail and content of many questionnaire responses indicated that social disorder linked to gang-related activity is a deep concern for many in the church, particularly for people living in urban areas. The broad range of perceptions regarding the level of disorder reflects the range of types of communities where respondents dwell.

Nearly three-quarters of questionnaire respondents described the level of gang-related disorder as high, serious or growing, whether in their own neighbourhood or as they perceived the situation in other parts of the country. One third described it as an increasing problem, particularly for deprived or inner-city urban areas. Some defined affected areas as suffering from social and economic deprivation with inadequate or ineffective political representation and participation. Areas highlighted included Birmingham, Bournemouth, Bradford, Grimsby, Hayes, Leeds, London, Manchester, Nottingham and Weymouth.

Nearly half of respondents living in urban areas agreed that the level of disorder was high or serious and some reported first hand experience of escalating violence in their neighbourhood. Some areas are experiencing an increase in both gun and knife crime, accompanied by drug taking, drunkenness at weekends and graffiti. "Violent crime is on the increase", said one respondent. Another from West London described a growing number of young boys and, more recently, girls as young as 12 getting involved in gang-related disorder. "Even some of our [church] members and families are severely affected by the level of the crimes," wrote a respondent from Birmingham.

However some felt that gangs are not a new social problem, but that media coverage has pushed the issue to the forefront of the nation's consciousness. A respondent from South London said, "Church members emphasise that it should not be exaggerated and made to sound typical of our whole area." Another from Birmingham said that "because of the hard work done by the Lawrence family, the death of a young Black person is more newsworthy than ever and consequently more questions are being asked about why it happens."

Many respondents felt that gang-related disorder is now an expected part of inner city life. One reported "only one shooting in the last year or so"; another said there have "only been a tiny number of cases involving guns". Some respondents explained that the level and nature of the problem varies widely, and that a fall in gun crime can be accompanied by a rise in knife crime. One respondent explained the cyclical nature of gang-related disorder using the Jamaican proverb "today fi mi, tomorrow fi you", and warned "cycles can become difficult to break."

Only rural dwellers described gang-related disorder as a low-level threat; "not in places like Sussex and the South East", said one. In the shires and in regions that are slightly or unaffected, people described "copycat events rather than genuine gang-related problems". Just under ten per cent left this section of the questionnaire blank.



### **Afraid of young people**

About 40% of all respondents described the level of gang-related disorder as high or serious, with one suburban dweller in the Midlands feeling it was “spiralling out of control”. Some felt that the fear of crime is higher than actual crime levels, and worried that older people are afraid to leave the house at night. For example, if someone spits in front of them, these people may be reluctant to speak up for themselves or complain about abuse out of fear of being stabbed. In one area of Outer London, the local industrial wear supplier is taking orders for stab-proof vests.

Gang-related disorder has led to many, including the young, being afraid of young people. One respondent felt that gang-related disorder is mainly youth killing youth, “although not restricted to so-called ‘Black on Black’ crimes, though that is what the media tend to portray”. Where there are youth clubs the young people attending can become the target of gangs and are mugged and beaten on the way to the clubs.

A further effect of gang-related disorder is its ability to create ‘no go’ areas, which people avoid because of the perceived danger. “I don’t feel safe,” wrote one respondent, “because I have been threatened with beatings and regularly have run-ins with young men who think they can say what they like, park where they like, drive the wrong way up one way streets, etc.” This respondent continued, “you have to watch your back and don’t get out of your car if there are youths around because the favourite ploy is to attack you as you move from the car to the pavement and are vulnerable.”

People were frustrated by the way that gang-related disorder is giving their community “a bad name” and stigmatizing minority ethnic youths. One respondent said it gives “sceptics cause to point the finger at the minority youth for every crime”. Some pointed out that gang-related disorder is perpetrated by an urban minority but is socially disturbing for the majority. Others said that social disorder and violent crime are not always gang-related, and that some young people carry knives for protection where there is little or no organized gang activity.

### **Weapons and drugs**

Many respondents said that violent crime in their area was drug-related. Two respondents linked rising disorder to drug turf wars. “I have seen gang fights with 20 to 25 Somalis fighting each other with baseball bats in the afternoon over who owned my street as their drug turf”, said one respondent from West London. The same person said that in the summer of 2006, “drug gangs sat on my garden wall nightly waiting for drug drops or tooled up waiting to go and fight other gangs.” Another respondent from Leeds said, “I know personally of many young people who have been shot and some killed due to the drug lifestyle. In addition to this drug users and dealers are seen as acceptable targets for robberies.”

There is a perception that “the knife is superseding the gun as the weapon of choice”. One respondent said, “there are too many people being attacked with knives, a woman in Coventry was stabbed eight times this Friday at 7.30 in the morning!”

## **Summary**

Nearly three-quarters of respondents felt it is a growing or high-level or serious problem, whether in their own locality or in other parts of the country. Fear of crime seems mostly disproportionate to its true extent, but many respondents had first-hand experience of gang-related crime. Nearly one third of respondents said

it is localised to urban areas, inner cities or places that are deprived. Many respondents linked the phenomenon to drugs, and there was a perception that the knife has become the weapon of choice. Overall, the responses indicated that social disorder linked to gang activity is a deep concern of the church whose members are within the communities that are affected by violence.

## Part 2:

### Identifying the causes of gang-related social disorder

*What do you feel are the factors feeding social disorder linked to gang activity and violent crime involving drugs, guns and knives?*

Respondents identified a vast array of factors that they thought may be fuelling gang-related social disorder. Many people wrote in depth out of personal involvement through living and working within communities that are experiencing violent crime. Even those whose immediate neighbourhoods do not experience problems of social disorder had plenty of ideas about what is feeding it, suggesting a large proportion of the church is well-informed and engaged with the issues.

Most factors identified by respondents are complex and interlinked, but they could roughly be divided into four broad categories for the purposes of this report. First, issues relating to the local community include easy access to drugs and alcohol, lack of facilities for young people, a need for safety on the streets, peer pressure and a lack of community cohesion. Second, issues that fit most easily into the family context (of whatever shape) include lack of discipline, family breakdown, poor parenting, lack of moral guidance and lack of identity or belonging. Third, issues that are a consequence of a broader national culture or government policy include a general atmosphere of disrespect, an inadequate criminal justice system, deprivation, poverty, alienation and powerlessness, inadequate policing, and a lack of trust in the government. Finally, issues that are linked to the mass media relate to gang culture and media influence.

#### **Community-based problems**

The most commonly cited type of problem was that relating to the local community. Overall, the most commonly identified factor driving gang-related social disorder was easy access to drugs and alcohol, and problems of addiction; these were identified by nearly a quarter of respondents. A respondent from Grimsby said, "I know a young man who went out shoplifting, this was to get arrested, so that he would be on a Drug Rehabilitation Order that would enable him to access support and treatment for his drug addiction."

More than one in ten respondents thought that individuals join gangs and carry weapons for fear of being attacked. "Communities do not seem to trust one another or those within the community even," wrote a respondent from Stratford-upon-Avon. A participant from Nottingham said feelings of lack of safety led young people to use knives, guns and gangs because these "are the only things young people feel they can turn to for safety". Respondents also felt that weapons are too easily accessible.

A common community-related issue that respondents highlighted was a lack of positive role models or leaders, cited by 15% of respondents. One respondent wrote: "We live in a society that seems to have lost its way with no clear leadership from either government or cultural/religious systems. Breakdown of law and order and social responsibility inevitably follow."

Peer pressure was identified as a problem by 13% of respondents, while boredom or lack of facilities for young people were cited by nearly ten per cent.

"Disengagement from education and work leads to boredom," wrote one respondent. "The town is a dead zone at night with nothing for youngsters to do."

Some people felt that segregation of cultures and generations in their communities may be driving gang-related disorder. "Lack of association leads to suspicion and demonizing of the other," explained one respondent. Many identified racism as a problem. Some felt that racial intolerance is alienating young people, and driving them to seek alternative sources of acceptance and identity. The influx of new people from varying ethnic backgrounds is also perceived to be a factor. "There is a clash of cultures," wrote one respondent. Another criticised asylum seekers in the community "who come and are given permission to stay and are educated then move on. The ones that are left have little or no English and want to fight the system rather than become part of the community."

Some respondents felt strongly that a sense of community has been lost. They wrote of social and community disintegration: "We lack togetherness, common interests, common values, looking out for one another." One quoted the African proverb, 'It takes a whole village to raise a child'.

Another community-based issue which respondents identified relates to a lack of strategic-thinking on a local and perhaps national level. "The scattergun approach leaves gaps that are exploited by criminals," explained one respondent. Others said that a lack of funding was preventing more being done, "our organisation has the physical buildings but not the funding to deliver these services and support the strategies," said one respondent; another said, "some churches that would like to intervene lack resources, personnel, and know-how."

### **Family-based problems**

The second most commonly identified type of issue was that relating to the home environment. Within this category the leading factor cited was a lack of moral conscience or guidance; nearly 20% of people detailed this sort of problem. Some blamed the absence of moral teaching at home, one suggested that a reduction of moral teaching at school, with the demise of the school assembly, may be a factor. Some linked this to a reduced spirituality amongst young people, and criticised the Church for not being sufficiently forthright or confident to teach and promote the biblical foundation of God's love.

Many thought that the absence of discipline at home and in the classroom could be encouraging gang activity, and more respondents identified poor parenting as a factor. Some worried that government laws regarding discipline may prohibit parents disciplining children.

Family breakdown was identified by a large proportion of respondents. "Multiple deprivation indices and single parenthood...leads to a gang surrogate family scenario," wrote one respondent. One person suggested that gang activity is part of the legacy of slavery leading to dislocation and dysfunction of the Black family unit. Another said, "I believe this behaviour is developed as a consequence of neglect, leading to loneliness, leading to peer-pressure, fitting into social groupings, and then social groupings desiring to give themselves power/authority by use of guns and drugs etc."

A respondent from West London suggested absent fathers was a problem: "We have a lot of problems with Somali youths. Many come to the UK without their dads and assume control of the household when they are about 10 or 11. The mothers do not seem to be able to control them."

Other respondents linked gang activity to personal identity: "There is a need for identity and belonging, especially among Black boys, due to a lack of fathering and role models...there is a feeling that being part of a gang gives purpose and

self-esteem.” 13% of respondents cited the need for identity or belonging as a factor feeding gang membership.

“Some young people habitually turn to gang activity and violent crime following traumas/events in their young lives and those influences become dominant aspects in their socializing,” said one respondent. Another thought that for many young people, being in a gang is “just a normal way of life, they are just with their friends.”

### **Nationally-relevant problems**

A factor that arises within a broader national context is a culture of lack of respect for individuals, the community, and those in authority. Just over 20% of respondents identified this as a problem, the second most common driver of gang-related social disorder. It relates to a lack of trust in others, the police, and authorities.

Some respondents felt that inadequacies in the criminal justice system encourages gang-related social disorder, by permitting this sort of behaviour as well as by angering people who feel justice is not done. Some felt that inadequate policing was causing increased gang violence, due to slow police response times. “The criminal elements in our society are aware of this and know that they can get away with their actions.” One respondent said criminals seem to be untouchable within the local communities.

Perhaps linked to this culture of disrespect is a feeling of alienation or powerlessness. Respondents described this as: “not being listened to”, “not having a voice in decision-making processes or being part of a powerful group who possess the power/authority to implement changes”, “feeling disenfranchised”, and “pressure from media advertising to own material things in order to fit into society’s perception of achieving the dream”. Several respondents identified a lack of academic achievement and bad job prospects: “they have to find other ways to survive,” said one, another said that a history of worklessness leads to hopelessness. “An underlying lack of purpose and hope in life leads to low self-esteem, with youngsters placing little value on their lives,” said one respondent. Another suggested that people involved in violent gang activity may be acting out of revenge against family, individuals, community or state because they are bitter about being excluded in some way.

Many identified deprivation or poverty as a factor. One pinpointed ‘Black flight’, whereby professional Black people move away from deprived areas, leaving those who are poor. Another suggested ‘White flight’: “only the elderly White people and the poor are left.”

Some respondents blamed high levels of pupils from Black and White working class backgrounds with fixed-term and permanent exclusions from school. These can leave youngsters locked out of their houses because their parents are at work. “Some youths fall into the arms of gangs, criminality, police, social services – a slippery slope,” wrote one respondent.



Photo credit: Banksy

Another issue identified was inappropriate education for young people, and the problem of urban children being taught by rural teachers who do not understand or connect with them, thereby making learning difficult. With huge mixtures of nationalities in urban schools, fewer children have English as their first language,

making miscommunication more likely. This also causes dysfunctional relationships.

### **Negative media influence**

Finally, 17% of respondents identified the media as a cause of gang-related social disorder. Many felt that television advertising is to blame for influencing youngsters subliminally. "They get their standards from TV," wrote one respondent. Violent films and soft porn are readily available, complained another. Some pointed to media pressure to succeed. One respondent said that the MTV/U channel glamorised the gangster lifestyle. Another said that the media "give the impression that it's young Black men mostly that are committing the crime".

## **Academic research and applied wisdom**

Whilst research shows that gang members commit more crime than non-gang members and are more likely to deal drugs, and carry weapons,<sup>21</sup> there have been few systematic attempts to understand gang-related violence in the UK and to develop means to prevent it recurring. The institutional response has mainly been to detect perpetrators of violence and to punish them, rather than to prevent further incidents occurring. A project based in Manchester tried to tackle the social determinants of gang membership through preventative and diversionary interventions, but found that trying to prevent young people from joining gangs is problematic, not least because of the difficulty of defining 'gang' and the problems surrounding the labelling of gang members for inclusion in the project.<sup>22</sup>

According to an overview of 12 England-based studies into gangs and gang violence by Marshall et al. (2005), researchers agree that an absence of suitable close male role models, such as a responsible father, might promote gang involvement, with young people looking to the older gang leader as a substitute. They suggest that gangs form through processes of social exclusion or discrimination, with people coming together for self-defence and a sense of safety in numbers. They identified immigrant populations and those excluded from mainstream education being at risk, but said that gangs are grounded more on territory than ethnicity.<sup>23</sup>

The most successful attempt at reducing violence associated with gangs is US-based: The Boston Gun Project. Rather than addressing gang membership as a social problem, this project tackled specific acts of violence through focused law enforcement and communication with the gangs about what sort of behaviour was acceptable to the community. The researchers concluded that the root causes of gang membership do not have to be removed to be effective in preventing shootings.<sup>24</sup>

In response to this research, the factors that church respondents identified as feeding social disorder linked to gang activity and violent crime can be divided into factors feeding gang membership, and factors contributing to violent gang behaviour, whereby the role of the gang is to amplify offending rather than to

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<sup>21</sup> Marshall et al., *Rationalisation of current research on guns, gangs and other weapons: Phase 1*, London: UCL, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Bullock and Tilley, *Understanding and tackling gang violence*, Crime Prevention and Community Safety, 10, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Bullock and Tilley, *Understanding and tackling gang violence*, Crime Prevention and Community Safety, 10, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Bullock and Tilley, *Understanding and tackling gang violence*, Crime Prevention and Community Safety, 10, 2008.

cause it.<sup>25</sup> Whilst it is difficult to separate them, by dividing the factors in such a way it is possible to identify the most important factors to address – those that fuel violent behaviour in young people. It is the violent behaviour that is damaging society rather than the existence of gangs *per se*. This allows gaps and misconceptions in the church's thinking to be identified and addressed, and suggests that responses identifying factors which push young people to group together in gangs missed the heart of the problem.

The Church is uniquely placed to address these issues in the home, community and national contexts. The following analysis deals with these contexts, identifying the Church's views and areas in the Church's thinking that need addressing.

### **Factors that fuel violence: the home setting**

Most violent behaviour is learned behaviour, and for some young people, perceived as the only form of power available. Research suggests that the initial causes of violence begin in the home.<sup>26</sup> These include weak family bonding, ineffective monitoring and supervision; exposure to violence in the home; and attitudes, beliefs and emotional responses that support or tolerate the use of violence. Families with a high risk for child abuse tend to have absent fathers, few resources, and experience social isolation and economic stress. Research suggests that young people are more likely to commit a gang-related crime if a family member has criminal involvement, they lack a close male role model, and their parents condone criminal behaviour. Mentoring and improved community leadership are suggested as possible protective factors.<sup>27</sup>

Respondents were well aware of the role that family breakdown has in fuelling social disorder linked to gang activity, as well as lack of fathering or absent fathers and poor parenting. But respondents more commonly identified a lack of moral conscience or guidance and poor or no discipline in the home. This suggests that respondents were too focused on children's disruptive behaviour, and the need to curb it, rather than pointing to the possible underlying causes of the behaviour: lack of loving family bonds through time spent playing and conversing with parents. Also, there is a problem with this idea of lacking morals: the morality of a community is subjective and depends on context. In this case the perceived moral code of gang members is at odds with that of adults in the community, rather than being a deficiency that needs filling in. Key to this is communication between the two groups and mutual understanding.

It should be noted that no one identified exposure to violence in the home explicitly, although one respondent alluded to non-specific "traumas/events" in young people's lives. The pervasiveness of child abuse is hard to measure, but research by the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) shows that a "significant minority"<sup>28</sup> of children suffer serious abuse or neglect. A study of childhood experiences in 2,869 people aged 18-24 found that six per cent experienced frequent and severe emotional maltreatment during childhood,<sup>29</sup> and six per cent experienced serious absence of care at home during childhood.<sup>30</sup> According to Home Office data for 2005-2006, a child is killed

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<sup>25</sup> Marshall et al., *Rationalisation of current research on guns, gangs and other weapons: Phase 1*, London: UCL, 2005, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> Elliot, D.S., *Youth Violence: An overview*, Boulder: Regents of the University of Colorado, 1994.

<sup>27</sup> Marshall et al., *Rationalisation of current research on guns, gangs and other weapons: Phase 1*, London: UCL, 2005, p. 24.

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.nspcc.org.uk/whatwedo/aboutthenspcc/keyfactsandfigures/keyfacts\\_wda33645.html](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/whatwedo/aboutthenspcc/keyfactsandfigures/keyfacts_wda33645.html)

<sup>29</sup> Cawson, P. et al., *Child maltreatment in the United Kingdom: a study of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect*, London: NSPCC, 2000, p. 70.

<sup>30</sup> Cawson, P. et al., *Child maltreatment in the United Kingdom: a study of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect*, London: NSPCC, 2000, p. 46.

at the hands of their parent every ten days in England and Wales.<sup>31</sup> As an organised body of people, including families and networks of relationships throughout the community, the Church needs to address its lack of awareness of child neglect and violence modelled in the home.

### **Factors that fuel violence: the community setting**

Neighbourhoods with high rates of violence, crime and substance misuse tend to have high rates of concentrated poverty; respondents rightly identified this link. Interestingly, research suggests that the critical feature of such neighbourhoods is the absence of any effective social or cultural organisation. According to Elliot, "Poverty is linked to violence through disorganized neighbourhoods."<sup>32</sup> Among questionnaire responses there was a good awareness of the need for unity and organisation within the community. People identified segregation of cultures and generations, racism, influx of people from different ethnic backgrounds, and social and community disintegration as contributors to gang violence. These echo Robert Beckford's analysis that there is multiple structural breakdown within social, cultural, political, communal and moral forces in the urban context.<sup>33</sup>

It is striking that almost a quarter of respondents identified easy access to drugs and alcohol, and problems of addiction as factors fuelling gang-related social disorder. Although crime prevention and youth service workers link this to gang involvement<sup>34</sup> these are factors that worsen violence, rather than being key underlying causes. It is important that the Church recognises this.

### **Factors that fuel violence: the national context**

In the school and peer group context, young people have further challenges to negotiate as they try to find their niche in these new social systems. Research suggests that violence at school is related to competition for status.<sup>35</sup> Children who fail academically may form peer groups where feelings of anger, rejection and alienation are voiced and reinforced, and where they find a sense of acceptance and personal worth. In the absence of a strong bond with parents, the violent behaviour that these groups model and encourage can become an established behavioural pattern. Research indicates that social exclusion or rejection from institutions such as schools is a risk factor for gang-related criminal activity.<sup>36</sup>

Church respondents showed a keen awareness of the influence of such peer group pressures on young people. Few, however, explicitly referred to negative experiences at school, which is surprising considering the amount of time that young people spend at this institution. Some did identify the problem of exclusion from school, although their emphasis was that the children are not being looked after by an adult, rather than the more basic problem of the effect that not 'fitting in' at school may have on a young person's self-worth and sense of belonging, and that gangs may provide these where schools fail.

Another interesting observation is the large number of respondents – just over 20% – who cited "lack of respect" as a problem, echoing the government's respect agenda launched in January 2006 to tackle antisocial behaviour. This drive was based on the assumption that citizens have a duty and responsibility to respect the rights of others, and that government has a responsibility to intervene

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<sup>31</sup> *Homicides, firearms offences and intimate violence 2005/2006*: supplementary volume 1 to Crime in England and Wales 2005/2006, Home Office, 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Elliot, D.S., *Youth Violence: An overview*, Boulder: Regents of the University of Colorado, 1994.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Beckford, *God and the gangs*, London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Bullock and Tilley, *Understanding and tackling gang violence*, Crime Prevention and Community Safety, 10, 2008.

Elliot, D.S., *Youth Violence: An overview*, Boulder: Regents of the University of Colorado, 1994.

<sup>36</sup> Marshall et al., *Rationalisation of current research on guns, gangs and other weapons: Phase 1*, London: UCL, 2005, p. 24.



on behalf of society if it believes individuals are failing in their personal duties. Similarly, some replies to the questionnaire had a sense of the government carrying responsibility for doing something about the problem such as providing funding for youth services, setting up new initiatives, raising levels of welfare payments, and increasing the number of police. The government has encouraged British people to take this stance, but the church should reflect on the consequences of such a position and whether it is beneficial for our communities. This issue will be returned to in part four.

## Summary

Responses to the question were many and varied, some answers were particularly detailed, personal and perceptive, suggesting a high-level of engagement with social disorder linked to gang-activity. For the purposes of this report, the factors have been divided by context into the following: home; local community; national culture and government policy; and mass media. Academic research into gang-related social disorder suggests a further divide within these categories: factors feeding gang membership and factors contributing to violent gang behaviour. While these are hard to separate, only factors which feed violent gang behaviour are a menace to society, and are therefore the important factors to address.

In the home context, the Church was well aware of the role that family breakdown has in fuelling violent gang behaviour; some respondents identified absent fathers and poor parenting as a problem. But respondents more readily identified a lack of moral conscience or guidance, and insufficient discipline in the home. This suggests an overemphasis on curbing disruptive behaviour in children rather than identifying the root cause of it, pointing to a deficiency in gang members rather than seeking to understand their different moral code and the reasons for the differences. The Church also lacked awareness of the negative impact on young people of violence modelled in the home.

In the community context, questionnaire responses showed a good awareness of the need for unity and organisation within the community. People identified segregation of cultures and generations, racism, influx of people from different ethnic backgrounds, and social and community disintegration as contributors to gang violence. However, the most commonly identified factor driving social disorder was easy access to drugs and alcohol, and problems of addiction, but academic research suggests these are more closely linked to gang membership than root causes of violent behaviour. Some respondents identified insufficient funding to deliver services and support strategies, but rather than being a cause of social disorder, this is an inadequate response to an existing problem.

Finally, in the national context, respondents showed awareness of the influence of peer group pressures on young people, and the importance of close role models, particularly the importance of fathers. But few explicitly referred to negative experiences at school. A large number of respondents said "lack of respect" was a problem, and many, either explicitly or implicitly, suggested the government carries responsibility for doing something about the problem, such as providing funding for youth services, setting up new initiatives, raising levels of welfare payments, and increasing the number of police.

## Part 3:

### Initiatives that address gang-related social disorder

*What is your community/church/agency doing to address social disorder linked to gang activity and violent crime involving drugs, guns and knives?*

Respondents highlighted a great number of initiatives in operation. Those referred to here are just a sample from this limited mapping exercise. Scaled up, however, it suggests that the Church, nationwide, has a high level of involvement in tackling social disorder linked to gang activity. Initiatives varied in focus and extent, depending on respondents' circumstances and available resources.

#### **Multi-agency partnerships**

The most frequently identified type of initiative was multi-agency work, including collaborations with schools, local councils, independent advisory groups and the police. About 40% of respondents identified this sort of involvement. One commented, "we try to facilitate joint work between our congregation and other organizations, including local schools, welfare and education officers concerned with this terrible issue." Another said, "In our community, a predominantly White outer estate, our building is used by a police initiative working with youngsters in danger of being drawn into criminal behaviour." A respondent from West London described how ongoing discussions with the mayor and council workers about problems in the community had culminated in a council and a police-led Streets Ahead campaign to improve local services and reduce crime and unemployment in the area. This respondent also wrote,

"Following an awful second half of 2006, the stories of local people working in the area were pooled and given to the new police superintendent. From that, a meeting was held of all interested parties including youth workers, social workers, councillors, the MP, police, church leaders, anyone and everyone, to try and tackle the issues. An 18-month plan has been put in place and there is now more sharing of information. Everyone has also been invited to the regular Youth Partnership meetings. Our local CPSO team has been doubled in size and a Ward Panel has been set up to try and tackle some of the issues before they get out of hand."

#### **Activities for young people**

A common response was activities or facilities for young people, including youth clubs, skate parks, holiday clubs, dance classes, after school clubs or sports clubs. Nearly one quarter of respondents said their community, church or agency ran such activities. One described how the young people at church "are developing positive MC, rap and garage music and dance with an anti-drugs, violence and underage sex message...recent dance workshops were attended by 30 teenagers".

Respondents also described how the youth groups and children's work at church help young people to grow in faith in Christ, which gives them



Photo credit: Free@Last

“strength from his teachings when the going gets tough”. Linked to church-based youth groups, some respondents described “trying to provide the youth with positive role models”, particularly by modelling manhood for young boys, although these respondents did not give further details.

### **Training and Education**

Respondents mentioned training and education schemes for young people, including literacy and numeracy support for children excluded from school. A respondent in Birmingham described the scheme Black Boys Can: “We train and educate the boys with life skills and academic advice...this includes working with parents, various schools, churches and other institutions.” A few respondents were aware of schemes to train youth leaders in conflict resolution.

### **Advice, mentoring and counselling**

Drop-in centres for young people were mentioned by some respondents, with particular focus on drugs users getting advice. Some were involved in drug rehabilitation centres, although this may reflect the sample rather than being representative of the church at large. For instance, a respondent from Liverpool wrote, “The Salvation Army’s activities attempt to address an individual’s needs and this may relate to substance misuse, education, employment and self-worth.” Respondents who wrote about hostels for the homeless and drug rehabilitation centres underlined the importance of strict anti-social policies to protect local residents.

There was a strong emphasis on listening to young people and providing mentoring or counselling schemes, including counselling for victims of gun or knife crime. A respondent from Birmingham described an initiative called Families for Peace Ltd, which provides bereavement and trauma counselling, an annual memorial service for victims and their families, an annual peace concert and award ceremony, a schools outreach programme, home, prison and court visits, and a people’s question time with local politicians. Another described Mothers Against Violence, which functions as both a support group for bereaved families and as a planning forum for trying to prevent further deaths of young people. Some said their churches support and encourage parents, but did not detail how.



#### **Mothers against Violence - a perspective from Manchester**

The shootings began in south Manchester in the mid-1980s. A 17-year-old got shot in an argument with another man, and his death was quickly followed by several others. The frequency of fatalities increased and over the last 14 years 60 young people have been killed by guns or knives. There are many theories about the rise of violent crime: poverty, high unemployment, drugs, lack of policing, breakdown of the family unit, lack of church involvement, but ultimately it is about choice. What makes a young person choose a gun or knife to settle their disputes? Why do we feel we must protect our own interests above other peoples’ interests? What is it that as communities, parents and individuals we are getting wrong?

Many of us began to ask these questions and to ask what was being done. It appeared that nobody was doing anything. The riots of the 1980s did nothing to improve relations between the police and the community. Then in the summer of 1999 three young men were fatally shot in eight days which was just too much to bear. A woman called a meeting in the local youth centre which was attended by nearly 30 mothers from all the affected estates. So began Mothers against Violence, which met weekly to discuss the issues, mothers of victims killed talking to mothers of perpetrators of the violence.

Over the last eight and a half years, we have built effective partnerships between communities and organisations. We are a small dedicated team working to address the issues of gun and knife crime within Manchester and believe that if we are to be effective it is essential that young people are encouraged and engaged in helping shape their future communities. We work by raising awareness in schools and colleges through workshops to look at the effects of gun and knife crime and what it means to be in a gang, taking young people to visit prisons and listen as prisoners share their experiences, holding residential weekends to promote young people’s self-esteem and value their role within communities, and by providing youth drama and dance groups and a confidential community helpline on gun and knife crime issues. Mothers against Violence also have representation on both local and national strategic forums on gun and knife crime.

Historically our churches have been slow to respond to the issues of gun and knife crime within our communities, aside from one or two pastors in south Manchester there has been little collective ownership in working towards change. We believe that once the churches begin to take ownership, fulfilling the gospel imperative, God is able to do his mighty works.

**For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).**

Angela Lawrence, Mothers Against Violence



Some cited fora or discussion sessions with local Community Safety Officers. Another described a mentoring project to support people as they leave prison. One respondent from Essex described the Bar & Bus scheme, in which London Buses are converted into coffee bars for young people to come and play games, watch Christian videos and share their problems with workers. One respondent knew of a night club chaplain with a team of voluntary helpers in Bournemouth; police chaplaincy work was also mentioned. Some respondents said that their community/church/agency was involved in a scheme called Street Pastors.

#### **Street Pastors – being there for people in need**

Street Pastors is about signposting people towards help, but in order to do that you need to meet people where they are at. Jesus has a passion for the weak, vulnerable and marginalised, and we aim to be there for people as Christ is there in the midst of uncertainty. I believe Christians have a spiritual and moral obligation to bring hope where there is no hope, and peace where there is no peace.

The idea of Street Pastors is that we go around the streets in teams of a minimum of four people - but they can be as large as 20 - and work in pairs meeting, listening and engaging with people in the evenings and at night. We wear blue jackets with fluorescent yellow labelling, and caps with the same, so that we are visible. We have had lads ask us to take guns, or pick up guns from an agreed location because they are afraid to go to the police themselves. We see a lot of young ladies who have had their drinks spiked, so we reassure them and help them to go home by ordering a taxi. We often talk to young people from gangs and drug addicts. We even get drug dealers saying, “keep up the good work”.

Crucial to our work is what I call the ‘urban trinity’, comprising the Church, local government and the police. The police help by facilitating with training, giving us protocols and procedures, and we point people to the relevant local government contacts to get housing, drug rehabilitation, education schemes and social services. We have just finished a pilot ‘School Pastors’ scheme which we will launch across London from 2 June 2008 to support children as they go home from schools by riding with them on the buses and tubes and to make them feel safe.

Over 1000 people of all church denominations have trained as Street Pastors since the charity was set up in 2003. There are Street Pastors on the ground in over 60 towns and cities across the United Kingdom. We have a good percentage of volunteers in their 60s, 70s and 80s. One 71-year-old grandma dispersed an impending fight while two MPs watched in amazement. The Home Secretary Jackie Smith would like to see Street Pastors on every street in the United Kingdom, but we’re a long way from that.

The Church has got to realise that mission is not a two-week event. People need you to be there for them, whether their problems are related to gangs, drugs, knives, alcohol or fear. Whilst I commend churches holding activities in their buildings, we’ve got to get out of the buildings and do things in the community. I’d like to see every church and denomination get involved.

Revd Les Isaac, co-founder of Street Pastors and CEO of Ascension Trust

#### **Prayer**

Surprisingly few respondents identified prayer as something that their community/church/agency was doing to address social disorder linked to gang activity, possibly because of how the question was phrased. Those that did include their prayer activity wrote enthusiastically of local, regional and national gatherings within and across denominations, and of prayer meetings in public places that featured in the local press. However, some respondents seemed disappointed that their prayer had not moved into ‘action’; one wrote, “we have spent a lot of time praying and seeking as to what action to take but haven’t worked as a group to eradicate this problem.”

#### **Rural Responses**

Almost half of rural responses acknowledged that their community/church/agency was not doing anything to tackle social disorder linked to gang activity, mostly because they felt that “gang activity and violent crime are not an issue in our community as yet.”

## Linking the concept to the action

Part two outlined the Church's thinking about what is fuelling social disorder linked to gang activity. Comparing the identified problems to what the Church is doing to address them shows how well the Church is engaging with social disorder by its own estimation. In this exercise the matching of problems with actions is approximate, and simply shows effort being made. There is no implicit assumption that these efforts are solving the problems identified, rather, it assumes that these activities have the potential to reduce social disorder linked to gang activity.

Linking the concept to the action also highlights inconsistencies in the Church's position and gaps in provision. Academic research into drivers of social disorder presented in part two showed gaps in the Church's thinking. Examining what the Church is doing in the light of this wisdom shows further gaps in provision and where the Church needs to concentrate its efforts. The problems and activities to tackle social disorder linked to gang activity are presented according to context.

### **The home context**

Lack of moral conscience or guidance was the second most commonly identified factor feeding social disorder, cited by nearly 20% of respondents. Some felt that the context for this is the home, others schools, and some criticised the Church for not teaching and promoting the biblical foundation of God's love. Few respondents knew of initiatives to support parents in this sort of role, although one respondent from London said the Church was "supporting and encouraging parents to bring up their children to respect their cultural values". Many respondents said their churches were providing faith-based youth clubs or teaching, which could help meet this need, although not in the home context.

A large proportion of respondents thought that poor parenting could be contributing to social disorder linked to gang activity, and an equal number cited lack of identity or belonging, but more identified family breakdown as a factor. However, only five per cent said their church/agency/community was doing something to support parents. Assuming that this limited sample of people is a true representation of the national, multi-denominational church, by its own assessment, the Church is not doing enough to support families. There is more being provided in the form of mentoring, which may help tackle problems in the family context after they have emerged.

### **The community context**

The most commonly identified factor encouraging gang-related social disorder was easy access to drugs and alcohol, and problems of addiction. To tackle this problem, the Church is active in a wide array of advice, mentoring and counselling activities, drug rehabilitation centres, hostels for the homeless and mentoring support for people released from prison.

A relatively small proportion of respondents said boredom drives social disorder linked to gang activity. However, the second most common overall approach to negative gang activity was to provide activities for young people, cited by nearly 25% of respondents. While activities for young people can be beneficial and help meet other needs, their primary aim should not be keeping young people busy.

Many respondents thought young people join gangs and carry weapons for fear of being attacked, and some felt that weapons can be accessed too easily. A similar proportion of respondents said that their church/agency/community is working with the police, indicating a consistent and appropriate response to help address the problem of safety on the streets within the sample of respondents.

Racism was identified as a problem by nearly ten per cent of respondents; others mentioned a lack of community cohesion due to segregation of cultures and generations, and high levels of immigration. The Church is seeking to address these problems through many of the multi-agency partnerships and activities which address community segregation. Perhaps particularly pertinent are the forums or community discussion sessions that churches organise with local Community Safety Officers and



Photo credit: Street Pastors

MPs. The work of Families for Peace Ltd in Birmingham, with its annual memorial service and peace concerts, may help promote community identity in neighbourhoods affected by violence through shared history and values, and thus help bring people together. In the consultation sessions for this report, people highlighted the interfaith work that churches are involved in, whose purpose is to promote better understanding and cooperation between faith groups in the community.

Given the importance that academic research places on community organisation and strong leadership in reducing gang violence,<sup>37</sup> and the relatively small proportion of respondents who highlighted it, the church should concentrate more reflection and effort in this area. In his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God”.<sup>38</sup> In its call to be peacemakers in the community, the Church should seek to understand what sort of community organisation already exists in the community, where there is a lack of integration and harmony, and what role individuals and groups can play in helping the wider community come together to resolve its problems.

### **The national context**

The second most common driver of gang-related social disorder identified by respondents was a culture of a lack of respect for individuals, the community, and those in authority. Some mentioned a feeling of alienation or powerlessness, “not being listened to”, and young people feeling disenfranchised. To address this problem, churches, communities and agencies are running drop-in centres and mentoring schemes to listen to young people and their problems. Respondents did not identify initiatives that give young people power in decision-making, although young people in some churches have been elected to the UK Youth Parliament.<sup>39</sup> Churches are involved in partnerships with local police and MPs which may help bridge the gap between young people, the police and the government.

A few respondents identified a lack of academic achievement and bad job prospects as problems fuelling social disorder, and several suggested that some sort of exclusion, for example school exclusion, may fuel gang-related violence. Respondents also suggested that inappropriate education and tensions in schools may be a problem. To address this, churches and communities are involved in partnerships with schools, as well as running after-school clubs and training and education programmes such as the scheme Black Boys Can. Drop-in centres and mentoring schemes also provide career advice.

Many respondents identified peer pressure as a factor contributing to gang-related social disorder. To address this, a number of respondents said their

<sup>37</sup> Marshall et al., *Rationalisation of current research on guns, gangs and other weapons: Phase 1*, London: UCL, 2005, p. 24.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew chapter 5 verse 9.

<sup>39</sup> *The Vine*, Birmingham, April 2008, pp. 10-11.





church/community/agency was involved in running youth clubs, some explicitly to provide positive role models for young people.

### **Addressing achievement – Black Boys Can**

Whilst exam results among Black boys have improved reasonably over the last few years, currently only 40% are gaining five GCSEs at grades A\* to C, significantly below the government benchmark of 55%. The National Black Boys Can Association was established nine years ago to raise the academic achievement and social aspiration of Black boys. Its umbrella organisation, Excell3, has broadened its mission to target disadvantaged children aged 9-16 regardless of race, ethnicity or gender. Excell3 works through National Black Boys Can franchises to empower local communities to raise achievement in schools. There are twenty different community franchises in and around inner-city areas with relatively large Black populations, including Birmingham, Bristol, Derby, London and Staffordshire, and more are being established in northern cities.

Of the boys on the National Black Boys Can programmes, nearly 70% gained at least 5 GCSE subjects at grades A\* to C. Whilst other factors may have contributed to their success, their involvement in Black Boys Can has no doubt played a role, and is made all the more striking considering that, in many cases, the children come from deprived socio-economic backgrounds.

Over the last few years we have worked in schools with boys who have been excluded or are on the verge of being excluded from school. Many have been involved in gang violence. The programmes are individually designed to cater for particular needs, for example in Wolverhampton we are working with the police youth offending team to re-engage and empower disaffected Black boys to help them get jobs.

The community-based programmes of the National Black Boys Can Association have impacted boys' lives in terms of their ability to communicate in public and raising their self-esteem. Some boys are members of the Black Boys Can National Youth Council, and in November 2007 some co-chaired a national teachers' conference organised by Excell3 with the National Union of Teachers. After four years of engagement with the Oxford University programme, in which boys attend the university for a session once a term, some boys have successfully applied and gained entrance to Oxford University and top Russell Group universities, something that would not have been possible without the specific interventions of the National Black Boys Can Association.

One of Jesus' central teachings was for his followers to spread the word in their communities. It is important, therefore, that the church is not seen as aloof from the community but, through its outreach programmes, to demonstrate Christian service. This can be done through education; many young people are frustrated with school life and school work. Most churches have large halls or a variety of rooms and congregations with a variety of qualifications. I suggest they consider holding revision classes or to mentor young people in secondary schools. Other opportunities include being involved as school governors or sponsoring individual students or schools in the government's academy schools programme.

Dr Tony Talburt, Education and Curriculum Development Advisor, Excell3

## **Summary**

The Church is involved in a broad range of initiatives to tackle social disorder linked to gang activity and violent crime. Most popular were partnerships with other agencies such as collaborations with schools, local councils, independent advisory groups and the police. A quarter of respondents highlighted activities or facilities for young people such as youth groups and sports facilities. Churches are also involved in training and education schemes, whose provision includes careers advice for young people and conflict resolution for youth workers. Counselling, advice and mentoring services focus both on young people involved in gangs and the victims of crimes.

Comparing these efforts to the views expressed in part two indicates where the Church is responding appropriately to social disorder linked to gang activity, and also where it has an inconsistent approach. Its strengths were in tackling the

problems of easy access to drugs and alcohol, and problems of addiction. Respondents identified a large number of drop-ins, rehabilitation centres, hostels, advice, mentoring and counselling services. The Church is also helping to bridge the divide between young people and authorities by forming partnerships with the police and organising community discussion forums with MPs and the police. Multi-agency partnerships may also help bring cohesion to communities. Partnerships with schools may help tackle low academic achievement and job prospects, as well as the after-school clubs, drop-in advice centres and training programmes identified by respondents.

Areas where the Church should reflect and focus its energies include supporting parents to be in a position to provide guidance and discuss values with their children, and parenting skills. The Church should also consider its role as a peacemaker in the community, and promote community organisation. Little was identified in this limited mapping exercise that might help give young people a voice. Finally, there was an overreaction to the perception that boredom fuels gang-related social disorder, with the church concentrating perhaps too much energy on clubs and activities to this end.



# Part 4:

## Improving our response to gang-related social disorder

*What more do you think could or should be done to address social disorder linked to gang activity and violent crime involving drugs, guns and knives?*

Responses could be grouped according to the first four areas in part 3 plus a new emphasis: building relationships. Many responses looked to the government to make changes, fewer looked to the Church. Respondents emphasised being proactive to prevent problems, rather than reacting to problems. One respondent wrote that we need to “aim to transform lives, not just contain bad behaviour.”

### **Multi-agency partnerships**

Nearly 20% of respondents said there should be greater collaboration between the different agencies involved in tackling social disorder linked to gang activity. To this end, respondents suggested improving dialogue between groups/churches, a multi-agency strategy, a structure to assist interagency work, national and regional databases to disseminate good practice, an umbrella organisation to support the work of the groups and an endowment trust to secure funding for such groups. One respondent wrote, “society needs to address [social disorder linked to gang activity] in a collective fashion and not as separate issues in isolation from each other (crime, substance misuse, education, employment social housing and self-worth).”

### **Activities for young people**

About one third of respondents thought that more facilities and activities for young people would help to address the problem of social disorder linked to gang activity. Included in this category are nearly 20% of respondents who suggested more “youth workers” are needed. Respondents also suggested that communities need more skate parks, internet access centres, games consoles, sporting activities, coffee shops, centres for creativity, and more events such as concerts and entertainment evenings, including “inspirational talks with a strong moral message”. Among the most creative suggestions were schools to set up exchanges with pupils in third world countries, free ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes for asylum seekers to improve community integration, and to celebrate Black history more than just once a year.

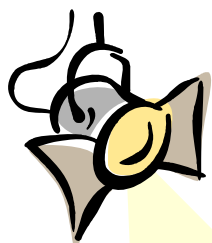
### **Training and Education**

Almost a quarter of respondents identified the need for training – for parents or youth workers or whole organisations – or for changes to the way that young people are educated. A few respondents called for more “moral education”, although some linked this to the home and others to school and church. One respondent thought that smaller class sizes would help, another called for “greater investment in self-esteem and self-worth teaching”. A respondent from Birmingham thought schools should teach children “from a young age in self-belief and confidence”. Another emphasised the need to start early with intervention work for young people identified as “at risk”. One respondent suggested that the police give talks in schools showing stab wounds to try to deter youngsters from getting involved in gangs, citing the success of scare schemes highlighting the danger of drink-driving.

A respondent from Essex suggested that the government should support training for “church and volunteer organisations that need professionals to be trained in a street wise approach.” Another from East London suggested that workers in all institutions, especially schools, be trained in Black history. One suggested that parents and young people work together with the police “through specific training...to equip them all with skills in conflict resolution.”

### **Advice, mentoring and counselling**

More than 20% of respondents said there needs to be an improvement in advice, mentoring and counselling services for young people. Included in this category are drop-in centres for young people, drug rehabilitation facilities, mentoring and role modelling, safe havens for young people that provide counselling and friendship, Street Pastors, and support for parents, especially single parents. Fewer thought there should be more support for parents and families.



### **Worth Unlimited – a learning community**

I first met Dave when he was 12. He lived in my street in a council estate and his Dad had just died of alcohol poisoning. He used to come to the house for someone to talk to, a male role model to help him through that time of his life when home was overcrowded and his Mum was too busy. He was not attending school regularly and his prospects did not look good. I liaised with the school and managed to get him a place at a nearby college where he started to do much better. When he was 16 we helped him get a flat and some furniture and continued to support him as he finished college and found a job. Now he is 21, holding down a tenancy, a job and a stable relationship. It is not easy, not every young person is an immediate success story. Lots of people talk about helping but at times it appears little changes.

At Worth Unlimited we are concerned not with building our little empire but making real changes to young people's lives and their communities, of seeing them experience something of God's Shalom - His concern for the whole of human and community life. We are therefore holistic in our work with individuals and groups, engaging the wider community in enabling young people to develop and grow as whole people. After one programme a young man said that if it wasn't for the programme he would be going to prison rather than college. Afterwards I reflected not just on the change in that young man's life, but that instead of costing thousands of pounds per week in keeping him inside and the cost to the victims, here some work had enabled a young person to begin to contribute to wider society.

It takes hard work, dedication, some skills and support to see change in lives like these, some of the most disengaged and disaffected young people in the country. Worth Unlimited has many such stories because we took the time and trouble to be there for them. Although we are a national organisation working in Merseyside, across the Midlands, North London and Macclesfield, we have a grassroots culture. We provide infrastructure, resources and expertise to enable local Christians to engage with marginalised young people, helping them to realise their worth and unlock their potential.

Our projects grow out of local people, communities and areas rather than being imposed from the outside. We talk of ourselves as a learning community, where we can learn and grow together from different parts of the country, feel supported and engaged by others doing similar work, and have input nationally on issues such as programme development, engaging the statutory sector and fundraising strategies. Our work can be placed into the following areas:

- Community-based work – detached youth work, bus projects, drop-ins, sports, arts, drama sessions where the emphasis is long-term presence in a local community.
- Personal and social development – our World Worth Living In program recently attracted central government funding as a key way to enable young people to develop skills and aspirations to make something of their lives.
- Social Enterprise – developing small businesses to train young people for employment and take a first step towards the world of work.
- School Exclusion/Alternative Education – working inside schools or in the local community running provision that re-engages young people in learning whilst enabling them to overcome barriers to development.
- Mentoring – a key part of our work is being a significant adult in these young people's lives. Often they have chaotic lives and need stability and constructive role models and relationships.
- Specialised residentials and workshops for young people to learn new skills.

Often we partner with agencies and funders in a local area to deliver a range of consistent support and services. We are often developing new programs, projects or ways of working. For example we are piloting a project in North London that seeks to peel away young people on the periphery of gangs. We support the work through best practice work, improving quality through research, training, workshops, and programme development.

Tim Evans, CEO Worth Unlimited

### **Engaging with young people**

Many respondents highlighted the need for better relationships with young people, which some said could be built through dialogue with gang members and young people in the community and church. One respondent from the Midlands said her community/church/agency should speak “with gang members themselves to find out why they became involved in gangs and the support they need”. Another said “anything that brings people awareness of their own value has got to be good. Programmes are fine but relationships with individuals are what really matter.” One respondent said communities should create forums for young people to air their grievances and meet with civil leaders.

### **Government-based action**

Some responses explicitly referred to the need for the national and local government to do something, such as provide more funding or change policies. Many stressed the need for more sustainable and higher levels of funding for local community initiatives. “National and local government need to ring-fence funding for this work,” wrote one respondent. “Unfortunately, the council has just made swinging budget cuts so many of the groups that were trying to tackle issues now have no money.” One respondent called for policies “that address the collective social and economic problems of an area to meet the people’s needs while taking into account their aspirations”. Others said the government should make tighter regulations for possession of weapons, and that young people should be automatically referred to drug rehabilitation centres on conviction.

The responses were not limited to specific government actions, however. One respondent felt the government sets the nation’s moral stance more generally: “There will be little or no change until the behaviour of all citizens, from the government down, showed a marked improvement in their realisation of the need for a more moral, and Christian, pattern of life.”

Many respondents implied that the government had responsibility for improving things by referring to changes only the government can make, for instance less emphasis on league tables “which encourage agencies to move troublemakers onto a different patch”. One respondent said there should be greater police visibility, others called for “more police”, increased welfare to the poor, more support for parents and single mums, smaller class sizes and a more holistic approach to healthcare.

### **Church-based action**

In comparison to government-based actions, fewer responses called for specific action on the part of the Church. Respondents were less specific about the Church’s role, generally calling the Church “to speak out more and act more to reduce violence and social disorder in the community”. Many respondents felt the Church community could provide more support through youth work, although respondents were pretty evenly split about whether that youth work should be faith-based – “helping young people to find identity in Jesus Christ, understand their faith, and influence their friends in the communities,” – or ‘detached’, whereby youth workers talk to young people on the streets or in places that are appropriate to them, on their terms, beginning from where they are in terms of their values, attitudes, issues and ambitions.<sup>40</sup>

Some respondents felt the community provision, in terms of mentoring and counselling through initiatives such as Street Pastors, should be better supported by churches. One respondent felt the Church should “establish a united political voice to set or contribute to the agenda regarding gang-related disorder.” A respondent from Birmingham said the Church should break free of its Sunday service tradition and become more involved in the community, “for many, the Church appears to be a closed community not really showing care in the form of

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.youthlink.co.uk/practicedevelopment/detachedyouthwork>

actions.” Others felt the Church should “help build a sense of community”, “develop a better image of Christianity”, and “develop better relationships with youth”.

## Summary

Respondents rightly identified the need to support parents, showing awareness of the gap in provision in this area identified in part three. There was a strong emphasis on multi-agency partnerships, and on listening to young people and building relationships, which may help address the needs for better community cohesion and empowerment of young people. A few respondents mentioned the need for young people to have greater self-esteem and self-worth, which they suggested could be promoted through teaching. Whilst this is a perceptive observation, its solution lies in building individual relationships on young people’s terms - in listening and valuing their views. To this end it is good that many respondents emphasised building relationships and engaging with young people.

The government’s respect agenda to tackle antisocial behaviour claimed responsibility for tackling crime and social disorder, which perhaps explains why so many respondents had suggestions for government action, either implicitly or explicitly. These suggestions include more sustainable and higher levels of funding for local community initiatives, tighter regulations for possession of weapons, greater police visibility, and increased welfare to the poor.

Suggestions for the Church were fewer and less specific. Some felt that the Church should better support mentoring and counselling efforts, establish better links with the wider community and youth, and speak out more boldly about faith in youth work and on the political stage.

# The Church as an agent of change

## A new message

Respondents addressed the need to change the message young people are absorbing from four contexts – community, family, national culture, and mass media. A negative message is influencing gang members and a constructive alternative is found in Jesus' gospel message. Respondents identified a lack of 'positive role models' in multiple contexts and both explicitly and implicitly advocated that a less passive, more aggressively 'moral' example be modelled (see above p20). Respondents were concerned with the negative role models provided by violent films and video games. Also identified is racial violence, lack of moral conscience and the absence of fathers. Some respondents called for more police on the streets to prohibit, prosecute and punish. To sum up this position, if violence is the imposition of one person's will over another by use of force, respondents are suggesting that young people be challenged to reject violence as a means of solving personal problems. However, this message is instantly displaced by substituting the violence of parental and state discipline. Here is a confusing logic: gang members are being expected to respect violence sanctioned against them but to reject violence that they perceive as working in their favour.

Activist and biblical scholar Professor Walter Wink has identified what he calls the myth of redemptive violence, both in Western media and the Christian message. Put simply: God is on the side of good people, in a dispute they are the ones who emerge with the political victory. He uses the example of children's cartoons – Popeye always out-punches Pluto because Popeye is the good guy. The belief that there are good and evil people who can be clearly identified as winners and losers is mediated by politicians, some biblical stories, film makers, and much western theology. By the measure of this message, Jesus would be counted evil or 'cursed' since he loses the battle of 'might is right'. However, in his resurrection Jesus points to a new message that refuses to give violence, legal or otherwise, the last word.



Photo credit: Banksy

Inner-city gangs are choosing violence to redeem themselves from their economies and disempowerment. Respondents have honestly addressed their own ambivalence to the role of coercive force to alter gang behaviour by mixing pastoral and penal solutions. Churches that engage proactively in difficult contexts are bound to be influenced by the negative message. This is especially so for the Christian community where the Christian message has always relied on government, in the form of moral laws, effective policing, and an efficient penal legal system to support it. All these things are referred to by respondents as effective measures against gang violence.

However, the Church is no longer in a position where it can assume the moral equivalence of the state. And the gap between the perceived moralities of the two is ever widening. Therefore, to pass on responsibility for social order to the police has been proven an unreliable avenue. There are broadly two theological responses to this: embrace the opportunities that come with being Church on the margins of influence or see this lack of influence as the problem and work to restore the Church's moral influence on society. If churches accept their position on the margins of society in terms of funding and government policy they will be taking a stance that far better parallels the context of the disciples and the early

Church through which the Jesus tradition was formed. Not only that, the Church will begin to look at the problem from the point of view of the gangs who, according to respondents, feel alienated by the communities they live in, schools, and wider society, and failed by the welfare system.

Through their involvement in gangs, young people are resisting the poverty and alienation of living in poor inner-city areas. If violence is not the redemptive medium then another must be found. What alternative message can the Church offer? Respondents were honest in their self-criticism in regard to the lack of confidence to teach and promote the biblical foundation of love. Not surprisingly, it is in the teachings of Jesus that this alternative message can be found.

Jesus' commandment not to "resist evil" (Matt 5: 39) provides the key to this redemptive message. Contemporary consensus among biblical experts has long translated this phrase as "resist not evil by force" rather than "do not resist evil". The assumption is that evil is to be resisted but not on its own terms. Jesus' redemptive message, as outlined in the Sermon on the Mount, reflects God's resistance through Christ and through the movement of the Spirit and the proclamation of the kingdom of God – a kingdom of resistance. Jesus' stance has often been dismissed as unrealistic pacifism. However, reading the bible from the gang-perspective it is possible to see how Jesus was teaching resistance to the message of redemptive violence for people who were on the margins of society and saw violence as their only option yet experience no real gains for their acts of violence.

As a further example of this proactive rather than pacifist message, Walter Wink examines the teachings of Jesus on violence more closely. Jesus famously taught, "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles," (Matt 5: 39 – 41, NIV). It would be understandable if modern churches chose to sideline these teachings as naïve or unworkable unless they could be read in a way that implied something richer than mere passiveness, more ethical than competing levels of violent force. The good news is that readings which engage comprehensively with what Jesus is saying here do present an alternative to both violence and pacifism: Jesus' third way.

Let us look closer at Jesus' axiom "If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well." (Matt: 6: 40, NRSV). An understanding of first century politics and Torah tradition clarifies this statement as a creative example of non-violent resistance to evil. If a first century Palestinian is giving up his coat it is because he is in serious debt and has nothing else to offer as mortgage. Therefore, if he offers his cloak as well he would be completely naked. The Torah-implication of seeing another naked is shame on the one who sees the nakedness, rather than the one who is naked (see Genesis 9:20).

There stands the creditor, beet-red with embarrassment, your outer garment in one hand, your underwear in the other.... You had no hope of winning the trial; the law was entirely in his favour. But you have refused to be humiliated, and at the same time you have registered a stunning protest against a system that spawns such debt.<sup>41</sup>

Jesus shows his listeners how they can creatively use the law to their advantage in both shaming their oppressors and exposing their own humanity to convert the oppressor.

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<sup>41</sup> Walter Wink, *Jesus and nonviolence: A third way*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003, pp. 19 – 20.

At the same time Jesus teaches the innate moral value of love of enemy as greater than revenge (Matt 5: 33 – 34). This is a starkly different message to the one that violent gangs have engaged in and it is a resource at the Church's finger tips. The consultation meetings for this report saw the need to encourage gang members to have a sense of forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus offers a practical way of living out reconciliation with dignity, love and justice. This report has shown that young people are bombarded in every context with the message of redemptive violence. It takes more than a theological position to alter the current spiral of violence that churches are seeing in territorial and crime-related gang culture. One avenue which some are exploring is promoting restorative justice as an alternative to penal atonement, both theologically and practically, in terms of constructive outcomes.<sup>42</sup> But this is one aspect of a broader Christian understanding of community and justice worked out below.

### **A new community**

Respondents noted that breakdown in the nuclear family, the absence of fathers particularly and of male role-models generally, have impacted the social development of gang members. Others mentioned the need for a wider sympathy and unity in the local community. Two types of groups identified in this report value belonging to a tightly organised and nurturing community: the gang and the Church. Of these two communities only gangs have members who predominantly live within the inner-city. Churches are equally likely to be commuter communities, forming briefly for worship or to serve the residential community in some way.

Having identified the break up of the family and lack of community cohesion as problems, the Church needs to be realistic about what can be done to address these authentically and biblically in response. Families that have broken up cannot always be restored, and fathers living abroad may not be suddenly persuaded to make constructive contributions to family life. Idealising the modern nuclear family may further alienate the many gang members who come from broken homes. Besides the practical difficulties, Jesus' own attitude towards family was far from straightforward (Matt. 12: 47 – 49; Luke 14: 25 – 27). Records of the early Church also suggest a community that was radically counter-cultural and bound by mutual aid and worship rather than family relation.

In theory and often in practice, the Church is in a good position to model the community values it has often sought to highlight only in the less distinctly Christian model of the nuclear family. It is also true that gangs already have much of what the Church seeks to embody in terms of family values incorporated into its own systems of loyalty and mutual aid. Neither community is perfect.

In the 1960s and 1970s, hundreds of Roman Catholics, living in the outlying favellas of Latin American cities rediscovered the Church's call to be a transformative community. They formed into what is commonly known as 'Base Communities': groups of around 50 to 100 people, including children who meet together to think through the social challenges they face in the light of biblical witness and prayerfully discern together ways to transform the unjust structures in their own communities. What emerged from these radical communities is now called Liberation theology and its influence is global. A significant breakthrough for Base Communities came in the realisation that they could discern the solutions to their own problems rather than have solutions imposed by outsiders in a top-down approach. This presents a dilemma for commuter-churches who are not part of the residential community yet seek to bring their own solutions to such communities. It also presents a problem for government and other professional agencies and perhaps even for reports like this!

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.restorativejustice.org/>

Churches can model this sort of community to gangs and more broadly to all inner-city residents. The story of Paulo Freire's<sup>43</sup> literacy programmes in Brazil is helpful here especially since a group of biblical scholars<sup>44</sup> have found a similar approach to that of Freire in the parables and teachings of Jesus. Freire found that by identifying the stories, fables, and truism that proliferate any community he and his researchers were able to use them to help the community become both functionally literate (I can read because I am reading a language I understand) and politically literate (I can discuss with my peers our received wisdom and assess it in conversation with outside support). In Jesus' case he gave his listeners insights on the kingdom of God. Liberation theologians call the process of reflecting and acting on social problems the 'hermeneutic circle'. First the community identifies a social problem, then it reflects on the problem using the bible, then it takes political action in response to the thinking, then the community re-evaluates its position and the cycle begins again. In his ministry Jesus continuously triggered this unrest through his parables; the ministry of the Church is to continue to be a catalyst and facilitator, empowering communities to find solutions to their own problems.

The consultation sessions for this report identified gang-violence as a community problem rather than a 'Black' or 'gang' problem. It also emphasised the need to listen to young people. It is also important to assume that gangs have ways of communicating how they understand and give meaning to the world, including their talk of God. These insights are important in finding a solution to the broader problems of social injustice. As the Churches begin to see marginalised young people outside of terms like 'problem,' 'threat,' or 'symptom' they can begin to recognise the solutions that may be hidden in the structural arrangement of gangs and the pathos found in their language and action. Indian Christian leader, Arvind P. Nirmal said, for marginalised Indian Christians, emotional outpouring and protest are essential steps in re-theologising for emerging Christian communities on the margins of society. Respondents and other organisations have shown a keen interest in the media of youth feeling but understandably shied from its violent content. It is possible that, like Daniel, Jesus, or John of Patmos, we can find value and truth by listening to the colourful, violent apocalyptic language of the fearful marginalised community and begin to understand their unique God-talk before thinking about how it relates to conventionally understood God-talk as mediated by churches.

During the consultation, participants suggested raising the profile of the work of the Church in places like the House of Lords. It is now half a century since Vatican II, the World Evangelical Council and the World Council of Churches affirmed the biblical need to see mission as of God rather than of the Church.

By drawing attention to work in areas of social deprivation in order to remind government of her contribution to social cohesion, the Church will be exploiting those she seeks to serve. But if, in line with the prophetic tradition, self-promotion is not the hidden motive, the Church is free to minister to alienated young people in whom, after all, Jesus is to be found (Matt. 25: 44 – 45).



Photo credit: Free@Last

<sup>43</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum, 2007.

<sup>44</sup> Ched Myers, William Herzog II, Walter Wink, and Bill Dols are examples in this field.



This brings us back to the concept of redeeming the gang. Redemption is very different to the conventional moralism of reformation of the gang. To redeem the gang is to find what is of value in it to us all and to catalyse its transformation. It is possible that gangs of young people can become co-agents of God's mission to transform unjust structures and proclaim the alternative message of the kingdom of God – a kingdom that does not revolve around violence but faith, hope, and love. Gang members live in a world far more similar to that which Jesus inhabited than most western Christians. This being the case, it is only in listening and being in solidarity with those so oppressed that they have turned to criminality that churches can re-convert themselves to Christ in the stranger and the Jesus of Palestine.

# Recommendations and partnership opportunities

## Recommendations for the church

- Develop strategic partnerships between churches, specialist agencies and community groups, drawing on local and professional expertise.
- Educate members to raise awareness of young people's needs and the pervasiveness of child abuse, as well as providing training for youth leaders and young people on the issues around guns, drugs, knives and gangs.
- Focus youth work on developing young people's skills and confidence through serving the community, providing an environment where they can find a sense of worth that families and schools may not be able to provide, as well as an opportunity to befriend adults who may become role model figures.
- Develop a strategy for supporting families, for example through working with social services with families that need help, by making information available through a lending library or through workshops and encouraging parents to share advice.
- Hold listening events where you hear from young people and/or members of the community directly, but these should initiate further interaction rather than being an alternative means of engagement.
- Find out what gang members need, find ways in which young people can explore biblical narrative and express their spirituality. Be creative together with the use of symbols for expressing faith.
- Consider moving back into deprived areas to live; encourage and support those who move to deprived areas.
- Focus on sustainability and encourage the wider community to take ownership of schemes and support them financially. Keep people informed, encourage accountability.
- Have an open door policy which offers support and advice for the community, for example by helping with employment or housing.
- Host community forums and meetings on these issues.
- Host events to promote peace and integration, such as community barbeques, peace concerts, visits and exchanges with other communities, etc.
- Have a prayer strategy attached to voluntary groups and businesses in the community, asking them regularly what they would like you to pray for.

- Ensure there are safeguarding policies in place so that both church and gang members are protected in case of difficult disclosures.
- Give young people responsibility and leadership roles within church.
- Create a training programme for all leaders on youth empowerment. Invite creative youth workers and ministers to guide your training programmes.
- Consider holding revision classes or get involved in mentoring young people in secondary schools.
- Support local schools by standing as school governors or by sponsoring individual students or schools in the government's academy schools programme.
- Develop a confidential counselling network for youth, for example by mentoring young people coming out of care.
- The Church should begin a process of self-examination and confession, considering its role in allowing a situation where vulnerable young people join violent gangs.

### **Recommendations for the government**

- Many church members feel that the government carries responsibility for 'doing something' about the problem of negative gang activity and violent crime in inner-city areas. The government should counter this view by encouraging and empowering local community members to tackle the problems themselves, in partnership with professional organisations and the police.
- Youth organisations and charities need greater support in funding and networking. Finding a means to provide more continuity of funding is particularly important.
- Continue and deepen commitment to funding and supporting work which involves young people in shaping provision to give young people a voice (e.g. through Youth Opportunities and Youth Capital Funds).<sup>45</sup>
- Government to invest in enabling young people to be involved in projects that promote community cohesion.
- Encourage inter-faith and inter-generational projects in which social regeneration is placed in the hands of community members.
- Invest more resources in Restorative Justice programmes due to their success in preventing young people from re-offending (more effective than Young Offender Institutions).<sup>46</sup>
- Support training for church and volunteer organisations working with young people who use drugs, guns and knives.

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/youthmatters/youthfund/>

<sup>46</sup> Peter Sedgwick, *Rethinking Sentencing: A Contribution to the Debate*, London: Church House Publishing, 2004.

## Recommendations for the police

- Communities and churches presently view police as law enforcement officers. The police should take steps to counter this negative image.
- Police who have already been involved in Restorative Justice projects need to celebrate the success of these and be available to train other forces in their benefits for communities and young people in particular.
- The police should recognise the role that churches can play in bringing together communities to fight crime and holding community forums. Strive to work with churches in a training, informing and capacity-building role.



### Free@last - a perspective from Nechells, Birmingham

Free@last exists to provide services and opportunities to improve the standard of living for inner-city people and help them reach their full potential. In Nechells there are problems of poverty, disadvantage, relational breakdown, unemployment and criminal activity. We provide a drop-in for dads and teenage parents, a youth club that anyone can come to, debt & benefit advice and mentoring for dads in a local prison, and the equipment and training for DJ and film/photography sessions, kayaking, mountain biking, football, and Duke of Edinburgh sessions. Free@last also provides a variety of holiday opportunities, including family residentials and Duke of Edinburgh expeditions.

We support people from all ages and ethnicities, there are no restrictions on who can drop-in and see us. Our people-centred approach means anyone who needs help becomes our priority; many people keep coming back to us because of the trusting relationships we have developed.

I've known TJ and his family since he was born. I saw him grow and develop as he came through the various clubs and services we provided. In his mid teens TJ got into drugs and soon became a mule, selling drugs for a larger dealer. Things got out of hand when a rival gang found out where he lived. The resources we had to offer were no match for the attraction of the drug scene: we had to watch as this intelligent, motivated young person had his life stripped away.

Then we found the funds for a mountain bike team and TJ became its first member. Training began and we entered races around the country, and for the first time in his life TJ found purpose and hope. He is now working hard at college and earning legal money. I wish that a happy ending had already arrived, but we are still working on that and our organisation needs more resources to make this happen. But TJ knows how proud I am of him and he hasn't given up yet.

In our community we also have a vast array of churches and congregations who believe they are fulfilling their mission and purpose. From my perspective as a previous member of one of these churches and as a local resident, I see the presence of the local church through the hundreds of flash cars and Sunday-best clothes, and then I see the people disappear after worship is over. They try to engage with local people through various services they themselves have decided on. A handful of people may be blessed greatly through their involvement with the Church but it does not infiltrate and influence the community of Nechells.

I believe there is no place for commuter churches in the inner-city as the congregation leave it. I believe there is a strong place for people from outside the community, particularly professionals, to be involved with community churches to help redistribute skills and resources and develop a holistic church. But the reality is that people who do not immerse themselves in the lives of a community, who are not involved in local peoples' lives, will be unaware of the issues that our young people face, never mind being in a position to offer help, support and positive opportunities. I pray that the local church will start to do the work of free@last through a community of inter-dependency and positive influence.

John Street, director of free@last

# Conclusion

Through questionnaire responses and consultation meetings, this report draws on views from a range of church traditions and organisations in England regarding gang-related activity. It is the first such scoping of what the Church is thinking and doing about violence associated with gangs, providing church and community leaders with recommendations for working together to promote peace in our communities.

The survey uncovered varied perceptions of the level of gang-related disorder, reflecting the range of cities, towns and villages and the neighbourhoods respondents live in. However, a large proportion - nearly three-quarters of respondents - felt it is a growing, high-level or serious problem, whether within their own locality or for other parts of the country. Nearly one third of respondents feel it is localised to urban areas, inner cities or places that are deprived. Many respondents linked the phenomenon to drugs, and believe that knives are now the weapon of choice. Some felt gang-related disorder is now an expected part of inner-city life, and some were concerned that gang membership is stigmatizing young men, particularly ethnic minorities, and that the current media focus on the issue is giving troubled communities a bad reputation. Another result of media attention is fear of crime, which seems mostly disproportionate to its true extent and affects both young and old. The responses showed that social disorder is a deep concern of the Church, particularly among those respondents who had first-hand experience of gang-related crime.

Asked about the causes of gang-related social disorder, respondents most commonly identified easy access to drugs and alcohol and problems of addiction, followed by lack of moral conscience or guidance, and a culture of lack of respect for individuals, the community, and those in authority. Many respondents identified a lack of positive role models or leaders, peer pressure, family breakdown, poor parenting and media influence. Respondents also pinpointed community segregation, alienation, deprivation, inappropriate or poor education and exclusion, lack of safety on the streets, and many more. The vast array of factors that respondents highlighted were separated according to context and whether they can be considered factors fuelling violent gang behaviour or factors feeding gang membership, whereby the role of the gang is to amplify offending rather than to cause it<sup>47</sup>. It is the violent behaviour which is damaging society rather than the existence of gangs *per se*, and this new focus, together with academic research into the issue, highlight gaps in the Church's thinking.

In the family context, the Church identified the role that family breakdown has in fuelling violent gang behaviour, a strong theme in academic thinking. Some respondents identified lack of fathering and 'poor parenting' as a problem. But respondents more readily identified 'a lack of moral conscience or guidance', and lack of discipline in the home. Respondents also called for more punitive measures for drug dealers, and for a greater police presence in inner-cities. Drawing on violent means to control violence, and assuming that gang members are morally deficient, lacks both compassion and understanding, and is a position that the Church must move away from if it is to be 'salt and light' and constructive peacemakers in our communities. It is also a convenient position; such an attitude puts the onus onto the government to do something, rather than looking at the resources to hand. The Church also lacked awareness of the negative impact on young people of violence modelled in the home. Although a few respondents were aware of work to support parents, little is being done. It may

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<sup>47</sup> Marshall et al., *Rationalisation of current research on guns, gangs and other weapons: Phase 1*, London: UCL, 2005, p. 11.

take imagination and commitment, but is this a necessary focus if the Church is to be proactive and address a root cause of gang-related activity. As a reaction to social disorder, however, the Church is active in a wide array of advice, mentoring and counselling activities, drug rehabilitation centres, hostels for the homeless and mentor support for people released from prison. Respondents also expressed the desire for more such services, and some said more needs to be done to support and strengthen parents and families.

In the community context, questionnaire responses showed a good awareness of the need for unity and organisation within the community. People identified segregation of cultures and generations, racism, and influx of people from different ethnic backgrounds, and this is a key area that the Church is working to effect change through whole community events, peace concerts, multi-agency partnerships, improving inter-faith relations and more. However, in many churches little is being done, particularly in rural areas. The Church must engage and listen to young people in the wider community as they voice their fears, thoughts and needs.

Few respondents were aware of the problems that young people face at school, and the isolating effect of not fitting into the educational system, causing young people to find belonging in gangs instead. Despite this, respondents identified many initiatives that the Church is involved or partnering in to provide alternative educational opportunities. These included after-school clubs, careers advice, and life skills and other training provided by youth schemes. Another misconception was that young people get involved in gang-related crime because they are bored. This has led to many churches providing youth clubs and leisure activities in a somewhat patronising attempt to keep potential offenders busy. Instead, youth work should aim to address young people's emotional and spiritual needs, providing an environment where they can grow in confidence and gain skills and a sense of worth that families and schools may not be able to provide. Perhaps the same or similar activities will be on offer, but the Church needs to become more aware of people's needs as a focus for prayer and constructive relationships.

Finally, at the national level, respondents showed awareness of the influence of peer group pressures on young people, and the importance of close role models, particularly the importance of fathers. A large number of respondents said 'lack of respect' was a problem. Many, whether explicitly or implicitly, felt the government carries responsibility for 'doing something' about the problem, such as providing funding for youth services, setting up new initiatives, raising levels of welfare payments, and increasing the number of police. Respondents identified a number of partnerships with the police and local government to improve safety on the streets. Many local churches are successfully involved in such collaborations, often whereby community forums or training sessions are held in church premises.

Taking this forward involves all of us from every community working together. Respondents expressed the desire to increase the number of partnerships that the Church forms, working with professional agencies, community groups and young people – including gang members – to address the factors that underlie gang activity. However, the Church lacks expertise and recognises its need for training, as well as the need to raise awareness amongst members and speak out with a stronger voice for justice and peace on the local and national political stage. However, this report cautions against the temptation for Church leaders, on a national level, to use the good work undertaken by Christians in inner-city communities to try to re-establish the Christian lobby to its previous place of political privilege. Too close a partnership between Church and state can lead to a theological position that listens more to the powerful than the alienated and oppressed.

The Church wants to listen more, to understand and engage with young people and address the segregation in our communities. Among the responses was the sentiment of opening the church doors to the community – to do so in the truest sense will involve living in inner-city areas and sharing in the community's hopes and fears.

This report suggests that the Church needs to read the gospels again in partnership with young people in gangs and allow them to shape their own faith-based solutions to the challenges they face. It points to the need to see the whole of creation in need of redemption – gangs, police, church, and all other principalities and powers. This is a shift to a liberationist model of standing alongside the marginalised and seeing both victims and perpetrators of violence as vulnerable people who, made in the image of God, are all essential conversation partners in seeking the kingdom of God. It is Jesus' teaching to the stranger on neighbourliness and on ministry which provide the theological criteria for judging the Church's response to the needs of inner-city communities.

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# Appendix 1 - Directory of initiatives

This directory shows some of the range of initiatives which address social disorder linked to gang activity and is intended to aid networking. The contacts were correct as this report went to press and is not exhaustive.

## National initiatives

*Addaction* - Britain's largest specialist drug and alcohol treatment agency  
[www.addaction.org.uk](http://www.addaction.org.uk)

*ARCH* - work with refugees and homeless people  
[www.spkweb.org.uk](http://www.spkweb.org.uk)

*Betel of Britain* - Christian community for homeless and substance-dependent  
[www.betel.co.uk](http://www.betel.co.uk)

*Black Boys Can* - Community-led educational opportunities, skills, and confidence  
[www.blackboyscan.co.uk](http://www.blackboyscan.co.uk)

*Connexions* - Information and advice for teenagers, with regional hubs and local centres  
[www.connexions-direct.com](http://www.connexions-direct.com)

*Dads & Lads* – YMCA project encouraging fathers/father figures  
[www.ymca.org.uk/bfora/systems/xmlviewer/default.asp?arg=DS\\_YMCA\\_WEBAR\\_T\\_115/\\_page.xsl/157](http://www.ymca.org.uk/bfora/systems/xmlviewer/default.asp?arg=DS_YMCA_WEBAR_T_115/_page.xsl/157)

*Gunz Down* - A multi-media show touring schools in London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and Nottingham.  
[www.gunzdown.moonfruit.com](http://www.gunzdown.moonfruit.com)

*Hope 2008* - Churches initiative to demonstrate and explain faith in action  
[www.hope08.com](http://www.hope08.com)

*Kidscape* - Charity to prevent bullying and child abuse  
[www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)

*Rethink* - Mental health charity  
Tel: 0845 456 0455; [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)

*Street Pastors* - Engaging with people on the streets to care, listen and dialogue.  
Tel: 0207 771 9770; [www.streetpastors.org.uk](http://www.streetpastors.org.uk)

*Tackling drugs changing lives* - Provides guidance on government drug strategy  
[drugs.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://drugs.homeoffice.gov.uk)

*Teen Challenge* - Christian organisation helping young people trapped by addictions etc.  
Tel: 01269 842718; [www.teenchallenge.co.uk](http://www.teenchallenge.co.uk)

*Urban Saints* - Christian youth movement, formerly known as Crusaders  
[www.urbansaints.org](http://www.urbansaints.org)

*Worth Unlimited* - Youth project providing various services in local partnerships  
Tel: 0121 693 5013; [www.worthunlimited.co.uk/branches](http://www.worthunlimited.co.uk/branches)

## **Initiatives sorted by region**

### **South East**

*100 Black Men* - Seeks to improve quality of life in African-Caribbean communities  
London; [www.100bmol.org.uk](http://www.100bmol.org.uk)

*Admovere Project* - Employability skills and advice  
Kingston upon Thames; Tel: 02085476934

*Bar 'N' Bus Trust* - Support and equips church outreach, school counselling service  
South East Essex; [www.barnbus.org.uk](http://www.barnbus.org.uk)

*Boyhood to Manhood Foundation* - Educational, providing positive role models  
Peckham, London; Tel: 0207 703 6415 / 0207 703 6415; [www.usatfbmf.com](http://www.usatfbmf.com)

*Mothers Against Guns* - Raising awareness and campaigning against violence  
London; Tel: 07944 025 721; [www.southwark.tv/mothers/mumhome.asp](http://www.southwark.tv/mothers/mumhome.asp)

*PACT* - Agency to support and strengthen families  
Reading; Tel: 0800 731 1845; [www.pactcharity.org](http://www.pactcharity.org)

*Peace alliance* - Church-led partnership to reduce crime  
London; Tel: 020 8808 9439; [www.peacealliance.org.uk/contact](http://www.peacealliance.org.uk/contact)

*Princes Trust* - Practical and financial support for young people  
London; Tel: 020 7543 1234; [www.princes-trust.org.uk](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk)

*Operation Trident* – Police initiative in response to concerns about gun crime  
London; [www.stoptheguns.org](http://www.stoptheguns.org)

*XLP* - Urban youth charity working with schools, families and communities  
London; Tel: 020 8297 8284; [www.xlp.org.uk](http://www.xlp.org.uk)

### **South West**

*Bread Youth Project* - Building skills & confidence through informal & social education  
Bristol; Tel: 0117 942 7676; [www.breadyouthproject.org.uk](http://www.breadyouthproject.org.uk)

*Club Chaplain* - Night club chaplain  
Bournemouth; [www.clubchaplain.com](http://www.clubchaplain.com)

### **Midlands**

*100 Black Men* - Seeks to improve quality of life in African-Caribbean communities  
Birmingham; [www.100blackmen.org.uk](http://www.100blackmen.org.uk)

*1st Class Network* - Youth network of motivated young people  
Birmingham; Tel: 07944 093 420; [www.fcyn.co.uk](http://www.fcyn.co.uk)

*Bringing Hope* – Churches' response to guns, drugs, knives and gangs  
Birmingham; Tel: 0121 772 3444; [www.bringinghope.co.uk](http://www.bringinghope.co.uk)

*Burley Lodge Centre* – Community centre  
Leeds; Tel. 0113 275 4142; [www.apdd96.dsl.pipex.com](http://www.apdd96.dsl.pipex.com)

*Families for Peace Ltd* - Resources and activities for those at risk of gang involvement  
Birmingham; Tel: 0121 327 6209

*Free@Last* - Services for young people, parents and other adults  
Birmingham; Tel: 0121 327 5959; [www.freeatlast.st](http://www.freeatlast.st)

*Handsworth Recreation Group*  
Birmingham; Tel: 0121 507 1777

*The Kirkby Trust* - Educational, recreational and social activities for young people and their families, and support and accommodation for homeless 16 - 25 year olds.  
Nottinghamshire and region; [www.thekirkbytrust.org.uk](http://www.thekirkbytrust.org.uk)

*Men's Room* – Helping black men achieve their potential  
Birmingham; [www.themens-room.org.uk](http://www.themens-room.org.uk)

*New Hope Mentoring Programme* – Training volunteers to mentor ex-offenders  
Birmingham; [www.faithworks.info](http://www.faithworks.info)

*Respect for Nottingham* – Making streets clean and safe  
Nottingham; Tel: 0115 915 4583  
[www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/home\\_bbn/sponsors\\_supporters/respect\\_for\\_nottingham.htm](http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/home_bbn/sponsors_supporters/respect_for_nottingham.htm)

*United Evangelical Project* - Provides services for deprived areas, voluntary.  
Birmingham; Tel: 0121 551 1207; [www.ueponline.co.uk](http://www.ueponline.co.uk)

*Young Disciples* - Youth work  
Birmingham; Tel: 0121 554 4404; [www.youngdisciples.co.uk](http://www.youngdisciples.co.uk)

#### **North West**

*M13 Youth Project* - Detached youth work, informal educ. & community development  
Manchester; Tel: 0161 225 0201; [www.m13youthproject.co.uk](http://www.m13youthproject.co.uk)

*Mothers Against Violence* - Mothers campaigning for peace, educating young people  
Manchester; Tel: 0161 226 8134; [www.mothersagainstviolence.org.uk](http://www.mothersagainstviolence.org.uk)

*Streets Ahead project* - Bradford council partnership group to improve services  
Bradford; [www.bradford.gov.uk/life\\_in\\_the\\_community/streets\\_ahead](http://www.bradford.gov.uk/life_in_the_community/streets_ahead)

#### **North East**

*Baseline* - Mentoring support for young people making the transition into independence  
Newcastle; [www.depaultrust.org/what\\_we\\_do/projects/baseline\\_north\\_east](http://www.depaultrust.org/what_we_do/projects/baseline_north_east)

*Shalom youth project* - Engaging with young people; informal Christian education  
Grimsby;  
[beehive.thisisgrimsby.co.uk](http://beehive.thisisgrimsby.co.uk)

*Streets Ahead Detached Youth Project* - Detached youth work and education scheme  
Gateshead; [www.streetsaheadyouthproject.co.uk](http://www.streetsaheadyouthproject.co.uk)

# Appendix 2 - Questionnaire

Social disorder linked to gang activity and violent crime involving drugs, guns and knives

Name.....Organisation.....

Address.....

Phone no.....Email.....

a) What are your perceptions of the level of disorder linked to the above?

b) What do you feel are the factors feeding this?

c) What is your community/church/agency doing to address this?

d) What other initiatives are you aware of?

e) What more do you think could or should be done?







# Who is my neighbour?



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