

**Comments on London Youth Crime Prevention Board Strategy
Submitted by Carlene Firmin, Policy Officer, Race on the Agenda – based
on evidence collected ROTA's Building Bridges Project**

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MAKING YOUTH JUSTICE WORK BETTER

1. Working with Victim Support to address the fact that 'strong correlation between young people who have been victimized and those who go on to offend will fail to reach the appropriate victims; the reason why young people who have been victimized may go on to offend is because they do not access mainstream services like victim support, and furthermore that they do not have trust and confidence in criminal justice agencies or other statutory institutions to protect them. Rather, they are much more likely to access support from local community groups which are chronically under-funded and therefore lack the capacity to offer support to all those who need it – or to publicise that such support is available. It is those victims who are not supported who may offend – the board needs to establish how best to reach those organisations who are aware of such individuals.
2. The idea of positive engagement between young people and criminal justice systems is a good concept; however, the means by which this can be achieved is not explored in enough detail in the strategy as it stands. There is definitely potential to engage with the third sector for examples of positive youth engagement and empowerment such as the work of Independent Academic Research Studies, Foundation 4 Life and Race on the Agenda. However, there also needs to be consideration of the negative impact of policy in fostering positive relationships; such as the over-policing of young people, especially young Black and Asian males, the use of ASBO's and policies such as stop and search which fall disproportionately on young people. There needs to be an acknowledgment that engagement is determined both by the parties involved (young people and CJS) and the context within which such engagement is developed (policies and political framework).
3. The focus on serious violence that affects victims could be problematic given the escalation from minor incidents of bullying and threats through to serious assault and homicide. We would be interested to see whether rape and sexual assault is considered to be serious violence or not, and what intentions there are to address such cases of violence.

4. Bringing criminal justice systems into school to increase understanding has the potential to be positive but only if this is used as an educative experience and not one where the CJS is simply brought into the education system – such as the use of stop and search in schools.
5. The key gaps in the youth justice system is the over-policing of young people and the processing of them through the criminal justice system without consideration of the impact that this will have on them, their families, peers and wider community; and furthermore, the lack of trust that currently exists between young people and criminal justice system. It is this trust that the third sector, especially local community based organisation, have with young people and where they need to be supported to build bridges between local authorities/agencies and young people.

SERIOUS YOUTH VIOLENCE

1. The most serious concerns for reducing youth violence should be the lack of knowledge of much youth violence that is taking place. For example, the use of gang rape as an alternative weapon to knives or guns has not been explored and is not represented in any statistics due to a lack of reporting. Serious Youth Violence is encouraged when groups are under-protected and over-policed and this is the current state of play with regards to young people.
2. There is a continued concern about the racial disproportionality of victims and suspects, and this is where there needs to be greater cross-agency work that takes into consideration the impact of social policy, discrimination and local authorities on levels of serious youth violence – for example education, health, employment and housing policies and agencies.
3. Gaps in engagement of third sector projects that are currently working, both at policy and research level (Building Bridges ROTA, IARS) and at service delivery level (Foundation 4 Life, Boyhood to Manhood, Community Builders and Lambeth X-it Project) needs to be addressed. As opposed to re-inventing the wheel and the waste of resources on advertising campaigns that do not appreciate the context within which they are being aimed at.

IMPROVING PRU AND ALTERNATIVE PROVISION ACROSS LONDON

1. It is concerning that there is no mention of ethnicity in the paper on improving PRU and alternative provision, given the disproportionate number of black young people who are excluded from mainstream education. If they are going to be excluded (and there should be some clearer debate on the reasons for exclusion and how this could be reduced) then where they are sent must also meet their needs in order to sustain attendance. Learning from organisations such as the Boyhood to Manhood foundation, which takes into consideration the impact of this disproportionality, could be such a way forward.

DATA DASHBOARD

1. The data dashboard has the potential to be successful, especially as a means of highlighting positive work of young people.
2. The fact that the perceptions of local residents are going to be monitored is concerning, depending on what informs their opinions in the first place. The keyword is 'perception' as a negative perception of young people does not necessarily indicate negative behaviour, and as such could re-enforce barriers rather than building bridges.
3. When monitoring the level of young people who feel safe in their local area they need to ask them why it is that they feel unsafe- is it due to policing, is it due to housing etc.
4. Rather than simply monitor school attendance or schools that are participating in safer schools partnerships, pupils' satisfaction rates should also be monitored and addressed.
5. It is concerning that the only occasion where ethnicity is measured is in regards to offending. We should be monitoring for ethnicity both in positive activities that young people are partaking in as well as their experiences of feeling safe and satisfaction rates at school. If this does not happen, such ethnic monitoring will only serve to re-enforce negative ideas of certain BAME groups.

SAFETY AND COHESION FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOLS

1. From a third sector vantage point the most positive contribution that schools can make in helping young people to stay safe is to focus on educating them and avoiding bringing the criminal justice system into the education system.
2. Such education would require a re-consideration of the curriculum as it stands and make it fit for purpose. Bringing in ex-offender education programmes, positive achievement activities and peer-mentoring

programmes into every school are the types of provision that the third sector can offer; working in this way creates great partnership work between third and statutory sectors. It will also increase understanding across sectors and support teachers.

3. Education that is more culturally sensitive is also important – this is not necessarily about teaching slavery. Rather, about providing a more honest account of British history that takes into consideration colonisation and that advocates positive contributions of various BAME groups to British history.
4. Education that highlights the various employment opportunities and careers open to young people is in need of development, given that much violent crime is fuelled by economics, inequality, materialism and poverty combined.
5. Sex education should also include discussion about rape and the use of sexuality to endorse violence; the power balance in sexual relationships and the need to consider issues of personal respect when having causal sexual relationships during early teenage years. This will begin to address the female endorsement of violent crime and the use of gang rape as an alternative weapon to knives and guns. For further information on this contact carlene@rota.org.uk