The Kenny Report

How do politics and economics affect gangs and serious youth violence across the UK?

November 2012

Contributors
Foreword

Viv Ahmun

The Kenny Report is a perfect example of what can be achieved when a talented young man from an impoverished community, where being employed, black, and without a criminal record is abnormal, is given access to the networks and resources normally reserved for those raised in a culture of nepotism. The Kenny Report, and the young man behind it, make a compelling case for the establishment of a more meritocratic society that injects hope into these communities without hope.

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There have been many academic studies and reports written about young people and gangs, and many more about the socio-economic impact of gangs and violence on urban environments. All provide a small piece of the road map about how society can adopt a longitudinal preventative approach to this important issue, but none tell the full story.

Kenny Imafidon's report is remarkable not because of its academic rigor, in fact the report represents a raw and to some extent self-opinionated assessment of the failure of politicians, of government institutions and of society to adequately address these issues. Kenny Imafidon's report is remarkable because it explores the complex and often contradictory lifestyles of real individuals whose struggle for morality is defined by their need to survive. As such this report highlights opinions and views that are often uncomfortable and challenging to our own tolerant attitudes.

What is most remarkable about this report, however, is that it is written by a 19 year old who has combined his own experience with that of the friends and of the gang members he grew up with, to create a detached yet relevant key to a full understanding of this complex subject, rather than just another small piece of the roadmap.
In 2011 the Home Office launched its *Gangs and Violent Crime* initiative. In 2012 the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) identified 259 violent gangs and 4,800 ‘gang nominals’ in 19 gang-affected London boroughs. The MPS claims that these gangs are responsible for 22% of the serious violence in the capital, 17% of the robberies, 50% of the shootings and 14% of rapes in the capital.

As a result of academic research and police intelligence we now know something about the history, nature, size and impact of violent youth gangs. Social scientists have told us about the risk factors that precipitate gang involvement, and the new Department of Communities *Troubled Families* initiative claims to have identified the crucial deficiencies in the families of gang-involved young people that lead them into a life of crime and anti-social behaviour.

However, what we don't have is an account of the lives, the thoughts, the feelings, the fears and the aspirations of the children and young people who end up becoming involved in gangs. And this is why Kenny Imafidon's Report is so important. Kenny was born and brought up in a low income London neighbourhood where gang crime is rife. Many of the children he grew up with were involved in gangs. Some are now dead, others are serving long jail terms for gang-related murders. He describes what it is like to live in a family where the mother has to take several poorly paid cleaning jobs just to pay the rent. He explains why poor single parent families, faced with constantly rising rents from avaricious private landlords, must regularly move house. He describes how young people in these households must therefore assume responsibility for their younger siblings at an early age. He also tells us about the pressures upon them to contribute to their family’s income, even if this involves them in the dangerous world of illicit drug dealing.

Kenny’s report is a remarkable document because not only does it ‘tell it like it is’, from the inside, it also cites data from official sources to back up the cogent arguments developed in this remarkable document. Anybody who is seriously interested in the ‘gang question’ should read ‘The Kenny Report’.

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1. Executive Summary

The word ‘gang’ means different things to different people: for some it may be a group of three or more people with hoodies; or a group of young people who hang about in their local estate till late in the night; or a group of people who join up to commit criminal offences. Gangs and serious youth violence have affected our country for years, especially in major cities such as London, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham. Gangs have been around for decades and have been constantly evolving over the years, they are far from a new problem generated by our modern society.

There has been some criticism that the government has not established a single definition that can explain what a gang is for everyone else to understand. In addition, the word ‘gang’ is widely and loosely used in our society by members of the public, by the media, and by professionals and politicians etc.

The widely accepted definition of a gang, which I agree with to a degree, is set out in the Centre for Social Justice’s 2009 Report, Dying to Belong.

The Centre for Social Justice 2009 report Dying to Belong defines a gang as: “A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who:

1. See themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group;
2. Engage in criminal activity and violence;
3. Lay claim over territory (this is not necessarily geographical territory but can include an illegal economy as territory);
4. Have some form of identifying structural feature
5. Are in conflict with other, similar gangs.”

Gangs and serious youth violence obviously create social disorder and have a detrimental effect on our society. The big question everyone is asking is how do we solve this gang problem, because the justice system is clearly not deterring the growth of gangs and serious youth violence in our society? At the same time there have been many inquiries, investigations and academic research to find out about and understand the objective characteristics of gangs such as their history, territories, size, nature and the risk factors that prompt gang involvement. Thanks to all this extensive study and research we are now at a point where we can objectively understand the many dynamics of a gang. Yet all the research we have on gangs still leaves us stuck asking the same big question year after year, government after government: “How do we solve this gang problem?”

Gangs consist of people, just like you and me, and yet there is very little research that sets out to understand the subjective characteristics of the people directly or indirectly involved in gangs. Too much time is spent understanding gangs as a whole and not enough time is spent tackling the root of the problem, which must surely include a deeper understanding of the individuals who make up these gangs, the people actively involved in the violence that take place in our communities every
day. Understanding the individuals and not the group will enable us to better understand the socio-economic issues that these communities face. Only when we understand the relationship between socio-economic factors and gang involvement, particularly in our deprived communities, can we make the right changes, and start to get to the heart of the problem. It is not possible to solve a problem you do not understand, nor one you do not want to solve.

This report asks the question: “How do politics and economics affect gangs and serious youth violence across the UK?” It is based on a highly detailed case study of an individual called Harro, who society would see as a gang member and a cold hearted villain, but who would be described by his friends and family as a decent person with good manners and a heart of gold, and who would do whatever he could for his family and friends. This central case study provides an insight into the thoughts and feelings of a single real-life individual, and the level of socio-economic deprivation he faced. A young man full of potential, who would still be alive today had the support he needed been in place when he needed it.

This case study shows us how ill-informed social policy and the ongoing cuts in the youth sector have affected Harro, his family, and many others like them in their community. This case study is based on one individual but this one individual shares characteristics with many young people involved in gangs, for example feelings of hopelessness, exclusion from society, socio-economic deprivation, growing up without positive male role models and not knowing how to get out of it all and find help to exit that lifestyle.

This report analyses seven significant influences, which affect young men like Harro and which steer them in the direction of gang membership and committing serious youth violence. These areas are: education, employment prospects, positive role models, housing, health, relationships and socialisation awareness, and community support.

2. Introduction

Gangs are not a new problem in our society, and they are not likely to disappear anytime soon. The Centre for Social Justice Report *Dying to Belong* (2009) estimated that around 50,000 young people in England and Wales are affiliated to violent youth gangs. Gangs have affected many communities in the UK, especially the deprived communities disproportionately affected by poverty, poor employment opportunities, inadequate social services, and home to a significant segment of the city’s minorities. Gangs continue to be a growing concern in many of our communities, as emphasised by many politicians and the mass media during last year’s summer riots. However, as stated in the Home Office *Ending Gangs and Youth Violence: A Cross Government Report* (2011): “The disorder in August was not...
caused solely by gangs but the violence we saw on our streets revealed all too vividly the problems that sometimes lie below the surface and out of sight.” (p.6)

The big question everybody has been asking concerning gangs is, how do we solve this gang problem? The answer to this question is quite simple. The only way to tackle gang culture in our communities is to tackle the social and economic issues affecting young people full of potential, young people who are growing up in these deprived communities and ending up in gangs. This report is based on an in-depth real life case study of a young man whose name has been changed to Harro to protect his identity. The case study explores how ill-informed social policy and deep cuts in the economy, particularly in the youth sector, have affected his life. This report will demonstrate how politics and economics affect gangs and serious youth violence across the UK.

This report will pay particular attention to the socio-economic factors that affect young people and families growing up in deprived communities, as well as comment on these factors and provide recommendations that will help tackle the social and economic issues in our most deprived communities.

3. Findings and Analysis

The case study, which underpins this report (see Appendix A), outlines a number of key social policy issues, all of which have had a direct impact on the experiences faced by Harro, his family and his community. These influences are as follows:

3.1 Education

The education system plays a crucial role in directing the lives of young people like Harro, and likewise a significant role in leading many young people like Harro into the gang lifestyle and fundamentally setting them up to fail.

Many young people like Harro have to face the reality that the schools they attend are quick to exclude them at the first sign of trouble, without the opportunity of helping them to deal with or rectify their problems. Many schools operate a tick box mentality, and have no time to deal with or try to help troubled students like Harro despite their attempted efforts to do so.

“The consequences of being permanently excluded from school are substantial for any child. Many never re-engage with formal education. Today, 40% of 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEETS) have been permanently excluded.” (Dr Maggie Atkinson, Children’s Commissioner for England)
The latest national statistics on Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions from Schools in England produced by the Department for Education were released on 25th July 2012 according to the arrangements approved by the UK Statistics Authority:

This Statistical First Release (SFR) provides information about exclusions from schools and exclusion appeals in England during 2010/11. It reports national trends in the number of permanent and fixed period exclusions together with information on the characteristics of excluded pupils such as age, gender, ethnicity, free school meal eligibility, and special educational needs as well as the reasons for exclusion.

The key points from the latest release are:

- There were 5,080 permanent exclusions from state-funded primary, state-funded secondary and all special schools in 2010/11.
- In 2010/11 there were 271,980 fixed period exclusions from state-funded secondary schools, 37,790 fixed period exclusions from state-funded primary schools and 14,340 fixed period exclusions from special schools.
- The average length of a fixed period exclusion in state-funded secondary schools was 2.4 days, for state-funded primary schools the average length of a fixed period exclusion was 2.1 days.
- The permanent exclusion rate for boys was approximately 3 times higher than that for girls. The fixed period exclusion rate for boys was almost 3 times higher than that for girls.
- Pupils with SEN with statements are around 9 times more likely to be permanently excluded than those pupils with no SEN.
- Children who are eligible for free school meals are nearly 4 times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion and around 3 times more likely to receive a fixed period exclusion than children who are not eligible for free school meals.

The number of permanent exclusions has fallen by two-fifths over the last six years

Figure 1
Another area schools fail in, is when advising young people like Harro about accredited and valued qualifications. Too often young people in schools in deprived communities are positively encouraged to take alternative and equally accredited qualifications such as BTECs, which are generally known as equivalent to two or four GCSEs. However, in some further education institutions, BTECs are not recognized as equivalent to these number of GCSEs, therefore many children are at a disadvantage even before they have left the school environment.

3.2 Employment Prospects

Young people in general and young black people like Harro growing up in deprived communities are disillusioned about their career prospects. They identify themselves as ‘young, black and poor’ and believe that only their white counterparts or privileged black people can pursue their dreams and enter into high-earning professions.
Unemployment in the UK 1992-2011

Number, millions

Source: ONS

Figure 3

Youth unemployment

Unemployment numbers, in thousands for 16-24 age group

Sept 2011: 1.02m unemployed

Source: ONS

Figure 4
The Office for National Statistics says unemployment for young black male jobseekers has risen from 28.8% in 2008 to 55.9% in the last three months of 2011, twice the rate for young white people.

More than half of young black men available for work in Britain are now unemployed, according to unpublished government statistics obtained by the Guardian in March 2012 which show the recession is hitting young black people disproportionately hard.

The new figures, which do not include students, also reveal that the youth unemployment rate for black people has increased at almost twice the rate for white 16- to 24-year-olds since the start of the recession in 2008.

(accessed on April 2012)

Young people in general are faced with the reality that their chances of decent employment are slim, and unemployment figures clearly show that if you are young and black, your chances of finding employment are indeed even less promising than those of your white counterparts.

Many young black people believe that the system is against them, with the two greatest barriers being institutional racism and poverty. At the age of 16 black people have three choices, which are to go into higher education, into employment or into a state of unemployment. Institutional racism underpins the trend that generally white people get into higher education and employment, whilst black people go into unemployment in disproportionate numbers and when eligible on to claiming benefits. Many young black people at the age of 16 are aware of the economic climate and the lack of legitimate career opportunities, so can often be lured into illegal ways of making money such as selling drugs, particularly if they are living in an area where this is an accessible and viable option. Young people in deprived communities who obtain criminal convictions by the age of 16 believe that no one is going to employ them anyway and therefore commit to ongoing criminality.

In deprived communities, people like Harro might believe they can become successful if they pursue a career in football or music, mainly because they see people like themselves in the media from broken homes and impoverished communities, who have achieved success in these areas. This gives them a sense of hope and empowerment. Let us take the music artist Giggs (Nathan Thompson) as an example. This young black man grew up in Peckham, South East London, in an impoverished community similar to Harro's. He received a criminal conviction for possession of a firearm in 2003, but after being released from prison, he pursued his musical dreams and through sheer hard work has become an award winning and internationally recognized artist. Giggs's story illustrates to many young black people that you do not have to be a product of your environment and that the wildest of dreams can come true regardless of your past or where you grew up and that all it takes, is hard work and persistence to become successful in life.
3.3 Positive Role Models

Too many young people from poor socio-economic backgrounds have no positive role models to speak of in their life. Harro's only experience of a positive role model was his mother. It is safe to say he had no positive male role models in his life, apart from his mentor/youth worker at the local youth club who, when he left, was never replaced by anyone of equal influence.

When Harro's mentor/youth worker left his job, there was nobody Harro could go to for advice, as he was unable to identify a suitable alternative who was approachable, trustworthy and who understood the challenges he was facing. Had Harro been able to place his confidence in a suitable male role model, his life could have turned out very differently.

3.4 Housing

One of the fundamental roots of many problems in deprived communities is the shortage of adequate housing. Let us use Lambeth as an example. The Housing Needs Survey (2003) taken in Lambeth estimated that 21% of the borough's households are living in unsuitable housing and of these, 57% require alternative accommodation to meet their housing needs. The Private Sector Housing Survey (2002) taken in Lambeth found that 11% of private rented stock was unfit for people to live in, compared to the London average of 5.6%.

Homelessness is a complex circumstance that can arise out of the following situations: shortages of housing, no entitlement to housing and the personal circumstances of the homeless person. In Lambeth, the supply of council housing now stands at half the level that it was for most of the 1990s and continues to decrease. Those who suffer most from the lack of this provision will generally be the poorest in the community, such as Harro and his family. Lack of adequate housing and homelessness have been identified as one of the root causes of criminality, substance abuse and poor health amongst people in impoverished communities.

3.5 Health

Public health is a key issue in deprived communities. Public health includes not only preventive medicine (e.g. screening, inoculation or health education) but also several areas not necessarily aligned with conventional health services, including housing, water supplies, and food hygiene.

Mental illness in particular is a problem in deprived communities like Lambeth. It is an issue rarely addressed and with little attention placed on it. Research by Guys and St Thomas hospital clearly shows this:

- While mental illness is not a main cause of excess premature deaths in Lambeth, people with mental health problems are at high risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD), diabetes and other physical health problems. Therefore, premature death in people with mental health problems is very likely.
• GP records suggest about 4,000 people with severe mental illness (schizophrenia and bipolar disorder - SMI) are known to primary care in Lambeth. National research suggests about 0.5% adults may have SMI. Across the country this would vary widely. However, the figure from Lambeth GPs is about three times the national average.

• National estimates suggest about 15.1% of adults over 15 years have symptoms of Common Mental Disorder at any one time. In Lambeth this equates to between 30,000 to 53,000 people aged 16 – 74 years and at least another 1000 cases over 75 years at any one time. About half of this group would benefit from some form of treatment such as talking therapy.

• In Lambeth, similar to the national picture, deaths from suicide and possible self-inflicted injury have gradually decreased over the last 10 years. During 2004 - 2008 an average of 23 deaths a year were attributed to these causes in Lambeth (8.65/100,000 population; similar to the London average of 8.3/100,000).


Mental illness impairs your ability to perform routine tasks, foster healthy relationships, and cope with anger or stress. It may be classified on the basis of extreme mood swings, irrational or destructive thought patterns, and behavioral problems. Harro and many of his friends could be classed as suffering from mental illness by this definition, thus having a crucial impact on their lives.

Harro had irrational thought patterns, behavioral problems in school and was desensitized to seriously harming or murdering someone in his community. When Harro was caught in possession of drugs and picked up by the local Youth Offending Team (YOT), he should have had mental and emotional support straight away because that is the sort of rehabilitation he needed. Harro’s poor mental and emotional state was not picked up by YOT workers; they were only concerned about Harro finishing his program and them completing their tick box exercise.

Harro’s mental state affected his self-image, which was negative and produced in him intense feelings of self-hate, anger, disgust and uselessness, fuelled by his lack of education and poor employment prospects. Harro’s mental state affected his education, as he socially isolated himself, had concentration problems, and as a result achieved low grades. Harro missed out on an educational experience that could have enhanced his social and intellectual skills and given him self-confidence and helped him achieve his academic ambitions.

Harro’s mental state affected his relationships in all spheres of his life- with his family, friends and potential girlfriends or love interests. He had unhealthy relationships with the young women around him and tellingly did not even have a best friend. Harro also suffered from insomnia caused by stress and anxiety and developed severe sleeping disorders which left him exhausted and less productive.
Good mental health is a necessity if we want people in our society to live a fulfilling life. Too many young people like Harro go through care and support services and their mental illnesses, and trauma remain undetected until it is too late. Too often the symptoms of mental illness are there, but go unreported or are misdiagnosed which can lead to drastic actions by the sufferer such as suicide and murder.

3.6 Relationship and Socialisation Awareness

In inner-city communities, not enough attention is given to raising awareness amongst young people about healthy relationships, sexual violence, consent, emotional development and general life skills. This seems to be particularly relevant when considering the reasons why young girls become involved in criminal activity or more often become the girlfriends of gang members.

Factors identified as particularly important in relation to delinquency in young girls include:

- Socio-economic factors (material deprivation)
- Weak attachments to school
- Low self-esteem

Research in Britain has, to date, tended to portray young women as playing subordinate roles in gangs, with women's relationships to gang members described in terms of dominance and submission.

Young women in similar communities to Harro’s who are involved in gangs are likely to be sexually exploited or abused by male gang members. Young women affiliated with gangs are, for the most part, treated as sexual slaves and forced to play out tertiary roles (look out for police, deal drugs, work in the sex trade to bring money in). Often they are traded among gang members for coercive sex. They can even be targeted for sexual assault as a form of reprisal or warning by members of other gangs. Too many young women are at risk and are indoctrinated into believing that the young men like Harro who are in gangs are the best ones to go for.

3.7 Community Support

The lack of effective rehabilitation services is a key problem in deprived communities like Lambeth. The Youth Offending Service (YOS) and Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) are ineffective and yet they are still contracted to deliver their services to young people like Harro.

The Youth Offending Team (YOT) is a multi-agency team that is coordinated by a local authority and overseen by the Youth Justice Board. It deals with young offenders, sets up community services and reparation plans, and attempts to prevent youth recidivism and incarceration. YOTs engage in a wide variety of work with young offenders (those under 18) in order to achieve their aims. YOTs supervise young people who have been ordered by the court to serve sentences in the community or in the
secure estate. Sometimes teams organize meetings between offenders and victims to encourage apologies and reparation. Results from YOT performances, especially in Lambeth, show that a disproportionate number of people who go through the local YOT programs are still re-offending.

The damning report by the YOT inspectorate on youth offending in Lambeth published on March 2012 said that the underperforming Lambeth team was in need of drastic or substantial improvement in many areas. The report by the Inspectorate exposes Lambeth Youth Offending Team as having one of the lowest scores in the country in terms of its effectiveness - 42 per cent compared with the national average of 63 per cent. Only one quarter of reviews into whether an offender risked harming members of the public were carried out within required time limits.

The primary reason for this failure is that the majority of professionals put in positions to help reduce serious youth violence, from heads of community safety to youth workers engaging with young people like Harro, just do not care about these young people as much as their rhetoric would suggest. They talk about building relationships and trust with young people and instead treat them simply as criminals. Countless numbers of YOT staff are inexperienced in dealing with high-risk young people like Harro and have no understanding of the challenges they face in life and the types of support and programs they need in order to prevent them from re-offending. If local YOTs asked more young people about what they actually wanted, like support with employment, education, emotional and mental health, and acted on what they were told, then YOTs would be more effective in lowering rates of re-offending.

Not enough money is spent on prevention and intervention services in communities like Lambeth. Instead, the money is targeted at enforcement-led approaches of dealing with crimes once they have happened.

The London Borough of Lambeth where Harro grew up, has the highest teenage homicide rate in London. Most of the teenage murders in London in recent years have taken place in deprived communities similar to Lambeth and not in the most affluent communities.
### Table of Teenage Murders per London Borough - 2005 to 2012, and Borough Rank on Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010

<table>
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<th>BOROUGH</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
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<th>2008</th>
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<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>Deprivation Rank 2010 (low numbers are most deprived)</th>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>285</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5**

There have been 12 murders in Lambeth since 2005 and it is the borough with the 3rd highest murder rate in London overall, as well as the highest teenage murder rate in London. It is also the 29th most deprived borough in the UK. It costs at least a million pounds on average for every murder investigation and prosecution in our communities. Therefore, since 2005 it has cost at least 12 million pounds to investigate the murders in Lambeth. This money could have been used instead to prevent and deter these murders in Lambeth happening in the first place and it would have cost a fraction of these millions spent.

Some local authorities have prevention and intervention programs to help young people affected by gang-associated risk, such as Southwark Council’s SERVE program. Although this pilot programme has much room for improvement, it does illustrate that some local authorities are taking the first steps towards preventing young people at risk of serious offending, re-offending and ending up in jail or dead.

A key issue with the services provided to young people at risk of offending or re-offending is that when the young person reaches 18, they are no longer eligible for these services. Teenage criminals do not stop committing crimes just because they have turned 18. There is a lack of services for people aged 18-25 and this gap needs to be filled.

Many support organisations can, on paper, show they are effective in providing services for young people like Harro. However, in real-life situations the people they employ often find it difficult to
engage with young people like Harro, due to a lack of understanding of the problems and issues that many of them face. This is made worse by the fact that many of these organisations do not have the capacity to provide their stated services effectively due to stretched resources and client caseloads that are too large for individual staff to handle effectively.

4. Recommendations and Conclusion

4. Lowering the voting age for young people from 18 to 16

Why is it possible for young people to go to prison at 10, give full consent to medical treatment at 16, leave school and enter work or training at 16, pay income tax and National Insurance at 16, obtain tax credits and welfare benefits in their own right at 16, consent to sexual relationships at 16, get married or enter a civil partnership at 16, change their name by deed poll at 16, join the armed forces at 16, but they cannot vote at 16?

Because there is no right to vote at the age of 16, many young people are disenfranchised before they even get a chance to vote. The political system is weighted in favour of those who are eligible to vote at the expense of young people who cannot. The impact of young people not being able to vote regarding critical services that affect their life chances are highlighted in the recommendations below.

4.1 Education

1. **Schools must find an alternative to statutory pupil referral units.** This is because when a young person who is classed as a challenging student and/or gang member is sent to a pupil referral unit, they become demoralized about going back into mainstream education and start to feel socially excluded. The pupil referral unit centers create the perfect opportunity for gangs to recruit vulnerable children. This is because the general profile of students attending the pupil referral unit centres is almost identical to the profiles that gangs look for when they are recruiting members.

   **Good practice exemplar:**

   High quality specialist provision needs to be delivered by professionals and organisations who know how to effectively deal with these challenging and vulnerable young people in challenging circumstances. Organisations such as Aspire Education provide enhanced education and training through high quality bespoke learning and skills programmes, behavioural mentoring and guidance. Aspire provide educational services in partnership with schools and other educational services. When a school makes a referral to Aspire, they
carry out a full psychological and educational assessment before devising a programme that is specific to that young person. They work with the young person in groups of no more than four students, and always give the young person and school a road map with specific timelines that will guide that young person back into achieving in mainstream education. The provision includes key family members, and actively encourages their involvement where possible. This enhanced model of educational support works best when the school continues to hold responsibility for their young person.

2. **Robust careers advice should be given to all students at school from year 7.** Many of the jobs in society and the access routes to them are not highlighted to young people growing up in deprived communities, which is a fundamental injustice. Far too many students in our communities grow up not knowing what career paths exist, let alone which ones they wish to follow, so they end up wasting valuable time studying subjects that do not serve them in the future.

### 4.2 Employment prospects

1. **The government needs to provide more support to community-based organisations that help young people in deprived communities find employment.** This will ensure that more young people can come off benefits and receive the support they need.

**Good practice exemplar:**

Southwark Works helps young people and adults who need extra help to get a job. The team of specialist employment advisors at Southwark Works can provide support to assist them finding and keeping a job.

If you are out of work, you can get help to put together a CV, be shown how to effectively look for work, receive help to improve your interview technique, as well as receive information and advice about training and getting work experience.

The team of specialist employment advisors provides personal, confidential support for unemployed residents affected by:

- long-term unemployment
- learning difficulties
- exit from social services and council care
- criminal convictions
- drug or alcohol misuse, particularly amongst ex-offenders
- housing issues
- negligible or no skills
2. The government needs to support organisations that help young people leaving prison to resettle through securing sustainable and worthwhile employment. This is because far too many young people, especially young black people, are claiming state benefit because they cannot find employment for one reason or the other, and often end up living a criminal lifestyle to meet their needs.

Good practice exemplar:

‘A Fairer Chance’ is a social enterprise that has an aim to identify and influence skills and training delivered in custody and translate it into paid work. ‘A Fairer Chance’ guides employers through the criminal justice and custodial system to find suitably skilled, risk-assessed people for their workforces. They help young people with a criminal background or at risk of offending to find sustainable and worthwhile employment with major high street retailers and national employers.

4.3 Positive role models

1. More needs to be done to recruit role models that gang members can identify with. These role models do not have to be ex-offenders, but they do have to understand offending and criminal behaviour within the gang lifestyle. A key social action approach would be train community members in key deprived areas to be mentors as well as professionals working in the statutory and third sector.

4.4 Housing

1. Tenant led initiatives are supported and have been made easier by the current government. The Localism Act is enabling local communities to take responsibility of services in their locality. These concepts are, however, not new and what needs to be looked at is how these entities are maintained and made sustainable. It is a fact that the tenant led sector is shrinking, and what need to be addressed are the causes of the demise of the sector. Tenant led initiatives are heavily dependent on voluntary efforts, and whilst this may still be the focus, there has to be a focus on opportunities deriving out of voluntary contribution. A clear strategy of what the gain/benefit/reward anticipated for a voluntary commitment has to be articulated. This would entice young people and individuals to take a more active role in their community, which will inevitably lead to increased community cohesion, break the culture of dependency and aid a geographical area out of deprivation. The opportunities may not immediately generate income, but rather act as a catalyst to access education, employment and other activities that can end poverty.
4.5 Health

1. Assessments on whether a young person is traumatised or suffering from mental health issues should be taking place from as early as 9 years old if the young person is showing signs of challenging behavior in primary school. The most deprived young people, those involved in gangs and other highly antisocial behaviour, often do not seek help for themselves and may not access conventional mental health services. If a child is suffering from embedded trauma, inherited mental health issues, or undiagnosed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder this can cause severe harm to the wider community as well to their own personal development and mental health.

Good practice exemplar:

MAC-UK successfully engages with some of the UK’s most excluded and deprived young people who are most in need of support, but least likely to access it. The unique MAC-UK model promotes positive mental health through innovative youth led projects and one-to-one Street Therapy work.

Street Therapy is at the core of the MAC-UK model. It is a flexible approach led by teams of mental health practitioners who adapt and apply psychological practice to make it accessible. Street Therapy can take place on buses, benches, in stairwells – anywhere a young person feels comfortable. The aim of Street Therapy is to alleviate mental health distress and ultimately form a bridge between young people and existing services. Street Therapy breaks down the barriers between young people and the services they so desperately need. The unique MAC-UK model and approach is currently being piloted by a number of health and youth offending service providers, Camden being one of them.

4.6 Relationship and Socialisation Awareness

1. Schools should ensure that their students are much more aware of the dangers of sexual exploitation and serious youth violence. This is because schools are too concerned about good results and statistical targets and are not so interested in protecting the well-being of their students by making sure they have their awareness raised on key issues that have the potential to put them at very serious risk.
Good practice exemplar:

The Safer London Foundation's (SLF) EMPOWER programme focuses on young people identified as being at risk of violence and/or sexual exploitation through gang association. It is a prevention and intervention programme. SLF work with local agencies and the police to identify young people most at risk and referrals are made via schools.

The delivery model consists of 4 strands:

- Group work programme for young women
- Intensive one-to-one support for young women
- Workshops for parents
- Group programme for young men

SLF also have four Young People’s Sexual Advocates who work across Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey and Islington. They are based in multi-agency teams and offer intensive one-to-one case work support and training to professionals.

4.7 Community Support

1. More efficient, sustainable and long-term funded services need to be delivered to young people over the age of 18 fleeing serious youth violence or exiting gangs. YOT services finish when clients are 18, therefore not enough help is provided to those vulnerable young people at risk of immediate harm or threats to life. The wraparound services that are needed should cover immediate rehousing, intensive one-to-one mentoring, after care support and trauma support.

Good practice exemplar:

Schemes such as Reset's Integrated Offender Management Plus (IOM+) pick up gang members in custody or in the wider community who may or may not be on court orders, and resettle them on a long-term basis (2 year minimum contact). The resettlement is based on providing safe accommodation, which is linked to intensive emotional support, and using local community support such as local sports groups, businesses, churches, mosques and community organisations. The reason why this is successful is because the community becomes a stakeholder in the resettlement of the offender, and becomes more ‘responsible’ for their rehabilitation and welfare.
Conclusion

We must work towards improving the lives of a small, disenfranchised group of young people and towards the elimination of the causes that have created this social underclass. All communities need to feel some sense of accountability. In the main this comes from the ability to vote and select political leaders and the concepts that they stand for. In any democratic society, citizens and the government work together to make their society the best that it can be. This process does not apply to young people who start their lives as citizens with a range of fundamental human rights, but not the right to vote. Whilst the majority of young people learn to take their ‘place’ in society, for some it is not so simple.

Young people living in communities with poor housing and inadequate and failing services in education, social care and children’s services, suffer a greater level of detriment within a cycle of compounded deprivation. These problems are systemic, with only a political solution as a viable means of change, and that process is not accessible to young people from these communities. This is the most significant driver behind the new street cultures that are commonly known as “road”, and which centre on the core values associated with gangs and gang lifestyles. The rap group Public Enemy, call for people to “make some noise”. In their own way, young people who belong to this social underclass with no access to the democratic process are making ‘noise’ within their own environment, such as the inner-city impoverished communities of London. This is often done at the expense of the communities that they belong to.

We have to question why Local Authorities who clearly have a serious youth violence or gang problem pretend that they do not, when statistics and the people in those communities clearly know otherwise. Is it because these authorities do not want to look ineffective or weak, or is it because they would rather pretend they do not have a gang problem and use resources elsewhere, preferring to focus on menial parking enforcement rather than young people’s services?

Everyone is accountable for their choices and should take responsibility for them, governments and citizens alike.

Many young people like Harro from deprived communities find themselves:

- excluded from school
- not being understood by others in society, only by gang members
- growing up in deprived communities where there are a lack of efficient services and therefore not getting the support they need
- growing up with no father figure at home, therefore with no positive male role models
- watching their single mum working extra hard and doing a lot of overtime work to look after them
- with dull education and poor employment prospects
- feeling let down by the system and believing that nobody other than their family or their gang cares about them
If young people like Harro join a gang, it is often because they feel that they have no other conceivable choice. They feel that their future in education or employment in the current climate is not bright, particularly when there are high numbers of unemployed young people with qualifications still struggling to secure employment and enjoy a regular income. That said, young people like Harro are still responsible for the choices they make. Although understandable, the reasons why young people like Harro join a gang can never justify a gang's activity in the community, which is after all principally concerned with breaking the law.

Young people involved in a gang, either directly or indirectly, are responsible for their own choices, however limited their choices may be, and they are still accountable for their own actions. Whoever they may blame for their unfortunate circumstances in life, whether it be their father for not being around, the government, the education system, the lack of effective services available, or even their friends, there are still some alternatives to becoming involved in a gang or criminal lifestyle. Every young person who involves themselves in a criminal lifestyle is ultimately responsible for their own actions.

Equally, the government has accountability and must take responsibility for their actions too. They need to accept responsibility for poor and ill-informed social policy which leads to poor socio-economic conditions such as a lack of housing, lack of effective support services for families and individuals who need it, lack of financial state support, poor employment opportunities and so on. They have to take responsibility for that and not blame the effects of their poor social policy on poor citizenship, the large number of ‘delinquents’ in society, and on a culture of dependency. It is government policy that creates the poor social conditions that have such catastrophic effects on the lives of young people like Harro and his family, and the communities in which they live.

We need to work together as a whole to change our society for the better: for better education; better employment prospects; better housing; better support services; better welfare benefits, and all the other key areas which affect the day to day lives of people in our communities. The problems in our community are solvable, and if we change our way of thinking we will come to realise it is only through a joint effort between government and citizens that we will actually change things to create a better and safer place for us all. Through taking responsibility, and more accountability, we can improve our society and the lives of those within it.
5. Appendix A: ‘Harro’ Case Study

‘Harro’ Case Study
“In just ‘one generation’ things have changed dramatically, from an era where adults would only sell class A drugs, to an era where people as young as 14 sell Class A drugs.”

Introduction
This case study is about my close friend Harro. It illustrates how Harro grew up in a poverty-stricken community and how his family (his mum) struggled to ensure that Harro could have the basic necessities in life and not live a life of crime, despite their hardships. The case study is based on my knowledge of my friend and his life; the harsh conditions he faced and the negative influences around him. What happened to Harro, has happened to many people in the deprived community where I grew up and similar communities across the UK.

Harro’s family background
Harro was a young black teenager from an African Caribbean background. He lived on a housing estate in South London. Since birth, Harro was brought up single handedly by his mum. Harro rarely saw his dad who did very little to help his mum financially, or even help look after him. Harro never grew up with a male role model like many other kids from his area, who were predominately black, so this was not anything new or abnormal for him or the majority of his friends.

Harro’s mum, Magdalene, came to the UK a year before Harro was born in 1993. She struggled to get by. Harro’s mum lived in Brixton (Coldharbour ward) in the London borough of Lambeth, in a two bedroom shared flat. When he was born, she worked as a chamber-maid, 5 days a week, full time (8 hours a day) and earned £120 a week. £60 a week went towards the rent and the other £60 went towards paying for Harro’s child minder (£40 a week), baby food and transport fares to get to work. She had no disposable income whatsoever. Like many other single working parents, Harro’s mum lived in poverty.

Poverty in Lambeth - One in three children attending Lambeth schools are eligible for free school meals (34.6% for primary and 29.7% for secondary). This is comparable with inner London (33.8% and 35.7% respectively) but higher than the national average (17.3% and 14.2%). Around a third (35.5%) of children in Lambeth live in poverty.

In 2011 there were an estimated 130,000 households in the borough. Nine per cent of Lambeth households were headed by lone parents. The national average is 6%. In May 2010, there were 6,210 lone parents receiving income related benefits in the borough, accounting for 17% of the total. Low-medium Income households make up 41% of all households in the borough. Thirty two per cent
of households are designated ‘low income’, occupied mainly by ‘social tenants’ in deprived areas, many from ethnic minorities. These tenants are concentrated in the Coldharbour ward where Harro lived.

Coldharbour is the poorest ward in Lambeth. Sixty one per cent of residents live in social housing, primarily on large housing estates. Two thirds rent from the council and one third from housing associations. Over one third of households receive child benefit and housing benefit while 20% receive council tax benefit, income support and tax credits. More are unemployed and available for work (13 v 18%). Residents tend to be young (53% are aged 18-34, compared to 45% on average) and 74% are from ethnic minority backgrounds; Black Caribbean (22%), Black African (14%) and 10% mixed or ‘other’.

- The employment rate in Lambeth has remained lower than London and England for the past 3 years reaching 69.4% in early 2009 compared to 70.5% for London and 74.5% for the rest of England.
- Lambeth has the lowest level of employment amongst the London boroughs.
- Despite the relatively high level of skills available in the borough, there are also high proportions of economically inactive people living here, and among those adults seeking jobs, 21% have no qualifications.
- Lambeth records 25% of users of community mental health services in employment from 2006-07 data, compared to the London value of 14.6% and an England average of 20%.
- Unemployment is becoming more common as measured by the Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) claimant count. There were 9901 claimants in March 2009 compared to 7,216 a year before. The proportion of resident working age people who claim Job Seekers Allowance is higher in Lambeth than in London or Great Britain (5% compared to 4%).

National research (Gingerbread) on single parent families shows us evidence that:

- Children in single parent families have twice the risk of living in poverty than children in couple families. Just under half (46 per cent) of children in single parent families are poor, compared to 24 per cent of children in couple families.
- Paid work is not a guaranteed route out of poverty for single parents; the poverty rate for single parent families where the parent works part time is 25 per cent and 19 per cent where the parent works full time.
- The median weekly income for working single parent families doing 16 hours a week or more is £337, compared with £491 for couple families with one worker and £700 where both parents work.
- 43 per cent of single parents are social housing tenants compared to 12 per cent of couples.
• 71 per cent of all single parent renters receive housing benefit compared to 25 per cent of all couple renters.
• Single parent households are the most likely to be in arrears on one or more household bills, mortgage or nonmortgage borrowing commitment (31 per cent).
• 38 per cent of single parents said that money always runs out before the end of the week/month compared to 19 per cent of couples.
• 63 per cent of single parents have no savings compared to 34 per cent of couples.

Parental separation and the resulting single parent status often leads to financial hardship. That resulting poverty may be a significant factor in explaining poorer child outcomes rather than family structure.

The only financial support Magdalene received was from her church. She never received state benefits because she did not want to depend on the state. She was prepared for Harro’s birth, buying most of Harro clothes and essentials before he was born, and even paid the first couple of months rent in advance.

Magdalene lived in that home for about two years. She then moved to a new two bedroom shared flat elsewhere in South London. By now she was working as a domestic, earning more, and doing longer hours (10 hours a day). Harro’s child minder still remained but Magdalene had to pay her more because she had to stay longer with Harro (£60 a week).

Magdalene then moved again to another area in South London a year after. She still had the same job and Harro still had his child minder. She moved this time because her landlord wanted a higher rent, which she could not afford.

Harro’s mother moved again two years later to another area in Lambeth. Then she had to move again. She was evicted by her landlord, who threw most of her valuables away. She was now homeless and pregnant with Harro’s little brother Lawrence. She went to the homeless unit who moved her to a two bedroom hostel space for which she was paying £145 a week plus £100 for the new child minder.

Lambeth Council gave Magdalene a new home later on that year. For the first time ever she lived in her own home and did not have to share with a stranger or another family. This same year (1998) Magdalene gave birth to Lawrence. Harro’s father was also the father of Lawrence, but he was not there for long after the birth of his second child either. When she had her second son Magdalene quit work and applied for Job Seekers’ Allowance for a couple of months, and also gave up Harro’s child minder until she got another job.

When Harro was 10, Magdalene went back to doing longer hours and Harro had the responsibility of looking after his little brother. She would work when he went to school and come back when he got back and then go to work again at night. She continued to do this until eventually she was not physically fit enough to work. Magdalene applied for Income Support and remained on that until
Harro was 16. She had a few close friends who would occasionally support her financially.

Magdalene loved Harro and Lawrence and worked as hard as she could to ensure they had a roof over their heads, food on the table, child minders to look after them when she was not there, and clothes and other necessities that children need. Realistically, Magdalene could have gone back to the Caribbean and raised both children without much difficulty, but she saw this country and especially London as the land of opportunity. She was realistic and knew it would be hard, but she never imagined how hard it could really be, living a life of virtual poverty. She had a good job before she came to this country as a bank manager and lived a comfortable life. However, Magdalene's qualifications and expertise meant nothing over here. She came to this country with a small amount of money and was just left in the wilderness to survive.

During Magdalene's life in this country she was under pressure and had huge responsibilities with no one to help her. She never cried for help, but maybe if people knew what she was going through, she would have got the support she needed. Maybe then she could have spent more time with her children to see their progress in school and have enough time to look after them herself. But Magdalene was playing superwoman; providing for her kids and their welfare, so she never really had the time to look after them herself. She gave her kids advice, told them right from wrong, and disciplined them but she never had the time to really keep an eye on them or look after them herself because she could not afford to.

Magdalene sacrificed a lot in order for her children to have the best possible life, in the worst possible circumstances. She never knew what disposable income was, because she never had any spare money after she had provided for her children's needs and the needs of her wider family, who lived in the Caribbean and relied on her to send them money. She loved them dearly and kept in constant contact with them, and she eventually took Harro and Lawrence there for a holiday, which was very expensive, but she did not want her parents to pass away and never see their grandchildren.

Magdalene never had any other relationships after Harro's father. Her priority was her children and her family back home. Her whole life was based on looking after others and not herself. Despite her low income and her many responsibilities, she still found it in her heart to help some of her friends who were struggling, by letting them stay in her home and helping them any way she could. Magdalene was a kind, caring woman. She was generous with a strong Christian faith, and it was God and her faith that kept her going each day and gave her the strength to go on.
Harro’s school & general background

Harro started his school life in the reception class of the primary school he attended in Lambeth.

Lambeth is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse areas in Britain. The 1940s and 1950s saw an influx of migrants from the West Indies and more recently the borough has seen increased migration from African and Portuguese-speaking residents. In the last few years growing numbers of residents from EU accession states have settled in the borough. Whereas 60.9% of Lambeth’s population was born in the UK, 36.1% was born elsewhere.

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<th>The ethnicity of the 15+ population in Lambeth (2010)</th>
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<td>White</td>
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<td>Black African</td>
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<td>Bangladeshi</td>
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This diversity is reflected in the Lambeth school population, with over 70% coming from Black or other minority ethnic groups. There are over 130 different languages spoken by families in the borough, the most common after English being Yoruba and Portuguese. One in three primary and secondary pupils in the borough (29.8%) are not fluent in English.

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<th>The ethnicity of the school population in Lambeth (2010)</th>
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<td>Caribbean</td>
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<td>Turkish</td>
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*Lambeth Research and Statistics Unit (2010)*
The Borough has a high level of population turnover. In 2008-9, 34,400 people moved into the borough, and 35,700 moved out, a total churn of 70,100. This is 24% of the 2008 population. The population churn gives rise to significant pupil mobility within Lambeth schools. The average pupil mobility is 8.1% in primary schools and 4.5% in secondary schools.

Harro moved from home to home as a child and he never really settled in one place. Unlike most children his age, Harro had to grow up fast. Whilst other children were still getting dropped off and picked up from school, he was going home on a 15 to 20 minute bus journey all by himself (his school was not in Lambeth) and looking after his brother Lawrence until his mum came back home from work. As far as he was concerned, this was a ‘normal’ life.

Harro enjoyed much of his primary school life. He did not cause much concern in school and was one of the brightest in his class. However, this all changed when Harro started secondary school at 11, that he never wanted to go to. It was outside Lambeth, and his academic grades deteriorated gravely. Within a year he was excluded for the first time, and then excluded every year at least four or five times thereafter, for not obeying school rules, missing multiple detentions, failing to hand in homework and his disruptive behavior in lessons.

Harro’s mum did not know about her son’s exclusions because Harro never told her. He pretended he went to school and would even lie about what he learnt that day. Harro’s mum never saw the letters sent home either because he would wait for them to come through the post and dispose of them. To make Harro’s life easier, he never told his mum about parents’ meetings so she could not find out how badly he was doing in school and about his exclusions. Although, she would not have been able to take time off work to attend anyway. So, as far as she was concerned, Harro was doing well and looking after his little brother well too. Harro’s mum never knew that all the responsibility he had, was seriously affecting Harro’s grades and performance at school. Even if she did, there was nothing she could do about it and Harro knew that as well.

In his secondary school years, Harro did not progress academically and had no support to survive or excel in a school environment. Harro was classed as a ‘troubled’ student in secondary school. As the general economic situation grew bleaker, Harro’s mum would have to work even harder to pay the bills, put food on the table and keep a roof over Harro and his little brother’s heads, resulting in even more responsibilities for Harro and a further detrimental impact on Harro’s life and educational prospects.

After school, Harro would rush home to pick Lawrence up from afterschool club and take care of him until his mum came back, and he would also have to drop him to school in the mornings. This all meant that on most days Harro struggled to do his homework after school and that he came in to school late almost every morning. Harro would come up with all sorts of excuses about why he was late and had not done his homework, but teachers eventually got fed up. Harro would get detention, but would not go despite many warnings of the consequences. This was because Harro knew his
priority was to pick his brother up after school, because if he did not social services could be called and Harro did not want all that drama for him or his mum.

One day, a teacher made sure Harro did not skip his detention. That same day Social Services were called because no one collected Harro’s brother from after school club. The school did not know who to call to collect him as there was no next kin registered for Harro’s little brother apart from his mum. As Harro’s mum phone was off, the school had no choice but to get Social Services involved.

Social Services also contacted Harro’s school as they were also concerned about Harro, and Social Services and Education Welfare started to investigate Harro and his family. Unsurprisingly, they did not spend the time to fully work out what was going on in Harro’s or Harro’s mum’s life. They were just fulfilling a ‘tick box’ exercise and clearly did not investigate the underlying problems in the family. They believed Harro’s family to be generally ‘okay’, which nobody who really knew them would have agreed with. Of course Harro’s mum never raised the problems she was having because she was frightened they would take her children away. Harro also knew the consequences of what would happen if he told the social services about his family’s struggles, so he lied and said that everything was okay.

After the Social Services investigation, Harro’s responsibility for his little brother was reduced, because Lawrence turned 10 and could look after himself more and get home by himself. He had also stopped going to the after school club because Harro’s mum did not want a repeat of what happened before and maybe this time she would not be lucky enough to keep her children.

When Harro was 15, he was caught with a small amount of class A drugs. When the school found out, they excluded him permanently, but with no official letter. They just told him not to come back to the school because he was not welcome there anymore.

Harro was charged and sent to court and was issued a referral order which he never completed and which was never followed up. He received no support from the Youth Offending Team (YOT), despite having issues with his reading and writing. He also told YOT that he owed money for the class A drugs that were seized, but they paid no regard to the matter and did not follow up his problem.

Now that Harro had been permanently excluded from school and owed people money for the drugs he had lost, he had to sell drugs full time to pay off his debt and make some real money to look after his family because no one was going to help him or clear his debt.

Harro had been going to a local youth club after school time and during holidays, to play football or other sport and occasionally go on trips, but this all ended because youth services were cut in his borough. Harro’s mentor also lost his job because of services being cut.

The YOT was of no help to Haro, displaying a wholesale ‘don’t care’ attitude towards a young man who was clearly very vulnerable. Harro felt all his life that the system had failed him and if anything, that it was against him. He ended up selling drugs full time and got himself involved in levels of risk that he never believed would have been part of his life.
Why Harro sold drugs

The main reason why Harro sold drugs was to supplement his family’s income and to ease his mother’s work load. He went to a local youth club where he met most of his friends, most of whom had been kicked out of school in years 9 and 10, and were either going to pupil referral units or selling drugs full time. Harro was still in school at this time and his friends would try and influence him to start making some money and ‘live the life’ and ‘stop living on mummy’s money’, but Harro always told them he could not, that his mum would kill him if he stopped going to school and started selling drugs. Harro’s fear of his mother, however, did not last long. He couldn’t help considering what his friends told him about selling drugs because he knew deep down he was poor and that he needed the money. Harro knew he had enough responsibility already but he still felt like he wasn’t doing enough to help his mum and his brother.

Harro always knew that his mum would rather be poor than have her son sell drugs and end up in prison or dead. But he became more and more convinced that selling drugs was the only way forward, he just could no longer live like this. He felt very strongly that his mum was a slave to the wage and he wanted to change things and look after her with the money he earned.

Harro felt he could not get a job at his age because he believed that no one in their right mind would employ him, particularly with such high rates of youth unemployment in the country, which he knew affected black young people disproportionately.

Black unemployment rate

Unemployment rate for black people aged 16-24

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Black Unemployment Rate</th>
<th>White Unemployment Rate</th>
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<td>Q4 2008</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4 2011</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
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Increase in 3 yrs: 70%
According to the Office of National Statistics (ONS), in the last three months of 2008 the unemployment rate for black people aged 16 to 24 was 28.8%. In the most recent quarter in 2011, this had risen to 47.4% – an increase of 70% in three years. This is more than double the unemployment rate for young white people, which increased from 15% in 2008 to 20.8% in 2011. Unemployment among young black women, while still higher than any other ethnic group, is lower than the black male percentage, at 39.1%.

What Harro did know, was that he could earn money easily by selling drugs because he knew more than enough ‘employers’ (drug dealers) looking for ‘employees’, and many of his friends were already earning a good living this way. Eventually he gave in and took the opportunity to start selling drugs at the age of 15.

The drugs network needed no particular skills or qualifications, you just needed drugs and clients, which you got by being in a gang or by being connected to gang members. Harro knew he would have to sell drugs part time, which meant he could not sell cannabis, so in order to make good money he had to sell class A drugs despite the higher risks.

Harro started selling drugs after school, leaving his little brother at home by himself. Harro knew what time his mum came back, so he would sell the drugs in the hours she was out of the house. He would spend many late nights out in the freezing cold, which meant he was tired for school in the morning and often late, and would never get a chance to do his homework or coursework. Any chance Harro had to sell drugs for longer hours to make more money, he took.

Harro wanted money to support his family, not to live a MTV lifestyle. The fact that he had to sell drugs, tore at his heart and worried him a lot, but he tried not to think about it because a lifetime of poverty tore at his heart as well. Harro knew that it would take years to qualify for a good job, and that even if you were a graduate you might not get one in the end. Harro also knew that the employment prospects of a young, black, unqualified boy with no experience were non-existent. He felt he had no other way to make it in life, so at least by selling drugs he could support his family and if anything start making a lot more money in the long run, like many of the other known drug dealers who were driving flashy cars and seemed to have unlimited cash. Harro just wanted the money. He wasn’t in it for the fame, the girls, or the lifestyle that came with selling drugs and being part of the gang.

Access to drugs in Harro’s community was very easy. Firearms were also accessible to purchase, though not as accessible as drugs. As a general rule, young people Harro’s age could access drugs and guns as long as they had the money, and the people selling the goods had no moral or ethical concerns about selling to people of such a young age. In these communities there were far too many people willing to sell to young people and it must never be underestimated how easy it is for young people to access the drug networks. In deprived communities young people are exposed to drugs very early, not only are class A drugs easy to purchase in relatively large quantities, but heavy drug users are easy to find, often congregating outside betting shops, cash converters and pawn shops.
**Why Harro joined a gang**

The best way for Harro to sell drugs was to do it for one of the much older drug dealers who had been selling drugs for years and had experience. If Harro was to sell drugs, he needed protection so that he wouldn't be robbed or bullied, because others would know who he was connected to. The more notorious the gang he joined, the more protected he was. Harro never really saw himself as a gang member, just connected to a gang.

Harro's boss and his friends made him feel more than welcome. He felt they understood his pain and they would give him money spontaneously, buy him clothes and trainers whenever they went out shopping, and even got him a moped for his 16th birthday. The gang became his family. He looked after them by selling drugs and making money for them, and he was looked after well too. He felt comfortable and stable for the first time in his life.

Harro had always dreamt of being a pilot, but even though he wanted a reason to say no to a life of selling drugs, when he weighed it all up in the cold light of day, his dreams just fell away. Harro was in a gang now, and his fate was set. The fear of leaving the gang and being seen as a traitor, meant that staying in the gang was already the safer option.

**Harro's mum's finances & money management**

Harro's mum lived on a very tight budget, spending more money on necessities (gas, electric, transport and council tax), and less on food for her home and to look after her two children. She travelled into zone 1 for work, because that is where the jobs were. With the cost of getting into zone 1 becoming more and more expensive, it cut deeper into Harro's mum's pocket and she could not keep up with the increase in ticket prices because her wages were not increasing at the same rate.

Harro's mum needed much more income to survive like many low-income earners. The rises in energy bills, inflation, transport fares, and council tax took up a high proportion of her income. Because Harro's mum's credit history was bad, she could never get a loan or purchase the goods she wanted to buy in installments, instead relying on loan sharks who exploited the interest returns on their payment. Harro's mum never told Harro or his little brother what she had to go through, but they both knew their mum worked tirelessly to make the little she had, but never knew how bad it really was.

Harro's mum could never afford any holidays for her and her children. The only reason they even went back to the Caribbean was because she did not want her children to grow up never having met their grandparents, or them to die without ever seeing their grandchildren. Even to go on that holiday she had to beg friends and family and work extra hard for that money.
**Harro’s home and local estate conditions**

Harro's home was overcrowded. There were only two small rooms with three people living in his house. Harro and his brother shared a room but were too old to share the same small space, generally clashing over minor disputes over space and privacy. Eventually, Harro's mum ended up giving her own room to Harro’s little brother and she started to sleep in the sitting room so that Harro and his brother could have their own space and privacy.

Harro had bugs and mice in his home like many others who lived in the 19-floor block of flats. His block was run down: it had smashed windows; people urinated in the lift and on the stairwells; and the lift, which was supposed to make life easier for those living on the top floors, had a mind of its own. The block Harro lived in was grimy and filthy, not renovated and smelt awful. The only reason people who lived there didn’t move away was because they had nowhere else to go.

Harro’s estate was in the middle of nowhere with no parking space for visitors. The closest corner shop was far away and the shop-keeper charged extortionate prices, ripping off the people who lived on the estate because they had no choice.

**Harro’s area in Lambeth (Coldharbour ward/ and a background on Lambeth):**

Lambeth is one of 13 boroughs that make up inner London. It is the second largest inner London Borough with an official population of 272,000.

The 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) places Lambeth as the 5th most deprived borough in London and 19th most deprived in England. Those living in the most deprived areas are spread throughout the borough but are particularly concentrated in Coldharbour ward between, Railton Road and the Moorlands Estate; the Crown Lane area of Knight’s Hill ward and the Angell Town Estate. The most affluent areas include the Thames-side part of Bishop’s ward and the Dulwich borders area of Thurlow Park.
The employment rate in Lambeth - In 2009, Lambeth residents of working age (69%) was lower than the average rate in both London (70.5%) and the rest of England (74.5%). 21% of adults seeking jobs in the borough have no qualifications. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) data reveals that in March 2009, Lambeth had the highest number of residents of working age claiming jobseekers’ allowance in London (9901, up from 7,216 in 2008) representing 5.4% of the working age population of the borough.

In the ONS Claimants to Vacancy Ratio (2011), which lists the ratio of registered ‘Jobseekers’ to available jobs in 206 UK regions, Lambeth is 34th.

21.8 per cent of people claiming unemployment benefit in the borough are aged 18 to 24. In October 2009, 1,015 people aged between 18 and 24 were claiming jobseekers’ allowance, up from 645 in the same month in 2008.

As is the case throughout inner London, there are significant differences in the employment rates of different ethnic groups in the borough. Black residents and residents of mixed ethnicity are much less likely to be employed than their White counterparts.

Income inequality in Lambeth is high and those people, who are in work, often living in the more prosperous enclaves in the borough and working in the City or the West End, tend to have high skill levels and incomes well above the national average.

Mental health - is a severe issue in Lambeth. General Practitioner records for 2008 suggest that around 4,000 adults in Lambeth were suffering from severe mental illness (schizophrenia and bipolar disorder - SMI). Whereas national research suggests about 0.5% adults may have SMI, the Lambeth figure is three times higher. Jane Padmore (2009) lead clinician at Lambeth CAMHS estimated the number of 0 to 17 years olds in Lambeth suffering from ‘mental health problems’ was in the region of 5,000.

In 2006 it was recorded that Lambeth had the highest teenage pregnancy rate in England.

Lambeth’s biannual safeguarding report into looked after children (2009) describes an increased proportion of new entries into care for deficiencies in parental capacity due to substance misuse, domestic violence and parental mental illness. According to the report, Lambeth has the highest rates of domestic violence in London and three quarters of children on a council protection plan have been exposed to domestic violence in the home. In total, some 38% of the children in care at the end of March 2009 were taken from families in ‘acute stress or in dysfunction’. The categories linked to drug use and domestic violence were above the national average of 22 per cent. The increase is despite the numbers of children in care falling from 570 in 2007-2008 to 546 in the year ending March 2009, and 173 new children going into care in 2008-2009 compared to 237 during 2007-2008. Abuse and neglect is still the most common reason for children to be taken into care but the percentage of total cases in the borough is 30 per cent, less than the national average of 48 per cent.
Harro’s neighbourhood in Lambeth has a violent history which is still relevant today; there have been many shootings and stabbings in the area and across the borough.

Simon Harding (2012) gives a flavour of the nature and impact of gang activity in the borough in his round-up of gang-related criminality on Lambeth in the recent past.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>15 yr old dies of stab wounds in gang fight involving 30 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Revenge shooting of two 17 year olds in Brixton McDonalds</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>17 year old shot dead at Streatham Ice Rink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>15 year old shot dead inside his home in Clapham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>19 year old shot dead in Myatts Fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>18 year old stabbed to death by six youths on bikes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>16 year old chased and savaged by pitbulls then stabbed to death by rival gang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>24 year old shot dead through a window with a Mac 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>19 year old DJ knifed to death following confrontation over a rumour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>22 year old shot dead in Gypsy Hill. Six convicted of murder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>15 year old stabbed to death by rival gang at school entrance in West Norwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>25 year old gunned down in motorcycle drive-by in Stockwell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>5 year old girl paralysed as gunman sprays Stockwell shop in revenge attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>18 year old shot dead near his home in Tulse Hill</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>14 yr old schoolgirl lures armed gang to home of ‘friend’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Lambeth experiences six fatal stablings or shootings between April and May prompts Emergency Violent Crime Summit, Community Leaders Forum and bid to GLA for extra cash to tackle gun and knife crime</td>
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</table>

The crime profile of the borough is distinctive. According to police data, Most Serious Violence (MSV), a category which includes murder, grievous bodily harm, attempted murder and wounding, rose by 26% in 2009/10. This represents the largest rise; the highest volume and highest rate of such crimes in London. In the same period, knife crime increased by 16.4% and 71% of all knife crime suspects were under 30. Coldharbour ward has 10% of all knife crime in the borough.

There has been an increase in recorded rape and sexual offences in the borough over the past four years with the average percentage ‘clear-up’ rate remaining low.
Sexual Offences in Lambeth 2007/8 – 2010/11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>07/08</th>
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<th>09/10</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rape Offences</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctioned Detections (14.9%)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Sexual Offences</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctioned Detections (23.58%)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average since 2006, there have been more murders in Harro’s borough than any other borough across London. In the beginning of Harro’s lifetime, murders were more or less unheard of, but as he grew older, murders became much more commonplace. In most cases the reasons were unknown, but people would still blame it on the local gangs in the community. There was hardly any effective crime prevention or intervention services going on in Harro’s neighbourhood whilst he was growing up, and hardly any youth provision.

Many schools in Harro’s borough were closed down over the years, but not enough schools were opened up to replace them. Also, many of the schools in the borough were known as not being fit for purpose. This meant many people like Harro had to travel outside the borough in the hope of getting a decent education.

Most of the properties in Harro’s area that were owned by the council (social housing) were very similar to his run-down outdated home. Newly built Council homes were few and far between. Most people living in social housing lived in the high rises; grimy, under-maintained and overcrowded homes. Nice homes, which were bought or privately rented by the higher-income earners in the borough, were not on the estates, or were in a segregated section of them.

Harro’s mum and many other earners paid council tax for the provision of schools, roads, libraries, rubbish collection, as well as the police, the fire service, children and young people services (e.g. YOTs) and many other local services. However, they seemingly did not get their money’s worth. For example, rubbish was not collected on time, there were not enough schools in the borough in relation to the number of young people of school age and the local YOT was not effective, as 40% of offenders who went through the program were still reoffending.

In Harro’s area, the young black people were stereotyped as being troublemakers, hooded gang members, knife-carriers, uneducated, rude, ill-mannered, and ambitionless people who wasted their time getting up to no good. Young black people were seen simply as thugs. Although some did fit that criteria, as would be the case in any diverse area, many were actually educated, had promising futures, were not in a gang, never carried weapons or committed crime, but were still labelled as part of a young, black, problematic underclass.
Harro’s understanding of the relationship between the older and younger generations, the (local) gangs and the different types of gang members

A lot of people think that the violence in Harro’s community was due to a big drug war that was going on. The truth is that most of the violence that occurred in Harro’s community was simply about reputation, power, credibility, and notoriety on the streets.

People from areas like Harro’s often watch YouTube videos and see people rapping about all the violence they have committed and about the violence they are capable of committing, which would be disturbing and seem irrational to most people. Young people in Harro’s area however would easily find themselves imitating these rappers and copying the lifestyles they glamourize and promote, often not realizing that many of the YouTube rappers do not live the lifestyles they rap about, and are themselves purely in it for the notoriety.

On the other hand, a few rappers did live the life they rapped about, and in those cases almost everyone from the community and other communities knew that they did. The music these individuals in particular produced was very influential in motivating young people from Harro’s area to do the things they did. These successful, criminalised rappers made it seem ‘cool’ to get all the materialistic things by illicit means that you could otherwise never have. But Harro’s mum had taught him better and not to imitate these so called ‘gangsters’; she had taught him that ‘not all that glitters is gold’, and that ‘good things come to those who wait’.

Films such as Scarface, The Godfather, Boyz in the Hood and Paid in Full, as well as series such as The Wire and The Sopranos, and mainstream soaps such as East Enders and Coronation Street, also played a part in influencing many young people into wanting to be the ‘bad guy’ (for them a gang member). A lot of young people like Harro would watch all these movies and soaps and see that the ‘bad guy’ got the beautiful women, the flash cars, and all the money without working hard to get it. Young people like Harro would see this and think that being the ‘bad guy’ was cool and an easy alternative to working hard to get the things they wanted.

In Harro’s area, the ‘top guys’ or ‘elders’ were grown men in their late 20’s and 30’s who were heavily involved in criminal lifestyles, but who never got their hands dirty as they had ‘youngsters’ to do their dirty work. Over time, a few ‘top guys’ and ‘elders’ did change their lifestyles, but not because they went through some fantastic service or intervention, if it happened it was usually because they had a religious epiphany and suddenly ‘saw the light’. These people would do their best to preach to the ‘youngsters’ to turn their lives around and not waste it on the ‘roads’ dying over something senseless. These people wanted the ‘youngsters’ to be on the straight and narrow. However, most people viewed these ‘changed elders’ as weak and ‘not fit for the roads.’

When black people in Harro’s neighborhood became successful in their chosen career path, whether as businessmen, lawyers, senior managers, chief executives, stock brokers, charted accountants etc.,
everybody would be surprised and think it a huge achievement. This was because they believed it was more or less impossible to become successful in anything because ‘the system’ is against you and worst of all blindly racist. There was a self-defeating thought embedded in the minds of the local black people about the likelihood of success, whether they had qualifications or not. Black people in Harro’s area believed that realistically only white people get the best jobs, and if you are black you can only get into a high-earning profession by working three times as hard.

There was no real hope in the community Harro was from, only glimmers of hope when a selected few would become successful in top careers. This would inspire Harro and his friends who wanted to make something of their lives, but that tiny speck of hope was not enough to deter them from a criminal lifestyle that created immediate wealth for their families through illicit means. There were hardly any positive role models in Harro’s area apart from the selected few that became successful, and they were nowhere to be seen after they found success. The only visible role models in Harro’s area were negative ones and were the so-called ‘rich, respected older gang members’.

A few of the ‘elders’ in Harro’s area were good to Harro and the other ‘youngsters’ and genuinely wanted the best for them. They wanted them to go to school, college and university, and end up getting a good job, so they could earn some ‘clean’ money and eventually move out of the area with their family.

The majority of ‘elders’ in Harro’s area, however, used the ‘youngsters’ for their own means and had only ruthless and sinister intentions for them, using them as a means to an end. If one young person died or went to jail doing something for them, they would simply find a replacement, grooming and exploiting them to sell their drugs, all in return for a little ‘respect’ and a bit of pocket money.

Some ‘elders’ wanted to help the ‘youngsters’ to make money without violence. These elders wanted the ‘youngsters’ be their protégées and did not want them to end up in jail or dead because they had strong relationships with them and cared about them. They wanted the ‘youngsters’ to make money and start their own legitimate businesses and look after their family and loved ones. Their intention was for the ‘youngsters’ to sell drugs for now and then use that money for positive means because they knew that money opened doors in life. However, in most cases this never happened for the ‘youngsters’ under their wings.

The gang members in Harro’s generation were predominantly from African backgrounds, unlike most of the gang members in the generation of his ‘elders’ who were predominately from African-Caribbean backgrounds. Many of the gang members from Harro’s generation came from war-torn countries like Somalia and Sierra Leone where they had seen massacres and genocides and had become desensitized to violent behaviours. They could attack or even kill without regret or emotion towards the victim, and this type of gang member made up a high proportion of the gangs in the area. These gang members got a buzz from all the illicit money they were making, (as most of them were from very low-income families), and also from the power, the fear others had of them, not to mention the respect they now felt they had.
Harro had been told that these gang members who came from Africa, including some born here in the UK, were doing voodoo and juju in order to stay alive and protect themselves. Even though he found it hard to believe, he knew there were people who practiced this art and that most people were scared of them. The gang members doing voodoo saw themselves as super-human and immortal, and could not die if they were stabbed or shot. Some gang members doing voodoo and juju would keep it a secret and some would glamourize the fact that they practiced it. These types of gang members thought they could cause as much trouble as they wanted, because they never had to worry about karma or retaliation on the streets, because they knew no one could put a stop to their lives on the roads. The police were the only people these gang members feared because they could take away their freedom.

Harro knew that in every gang there were ‘wannabe gangsters’ who joined for reasons other than low income. Unlike most of the others in the gang these ‘wannabe gangsters’ often had both parents at home who were well-paid professionals such as solicitors, policemen, doctors, nurses, teachers etc. These ‘wannabe gangsters’ lived in lavish homes and not on the 19th floor of a grimy block like Harro. But these ‘wannabe gangsters’ wanted to be ‘cool’ and act like they never had a better start in life. For these ‘wannabe gangsters’, being in a gang was a fashion statement and something they could glamourize without understanding the harsh reality behind it.

These ‘wannabe gangsters’, unlike Harro, could live another life destined for success if they wanted to but they chose not to. They never had a hard life of socio-economic deprivation like Harro, but sometimes they wanted street credibility and protection against mugging or bullying. Joining a gang out of fear meant they had something in common with the young people who were from socially deprived backgrounds.

Another entry route into gangs was through older siblings, with the younger siblings being consciously or unconsciously coerced into a lifestyle of high status and popularity in the area, often being ‘raised’ in a gang lifestyle because their family members were living it and it was all they knew.

Harro also knew that in every gang, there were a few high-status gang members who were actually very well educated, despite coming from broken homes. These members lived the gang lifestyle because they never saw any hope in pursuing the career paths they were interested in, but unlike others, they knew that the world was a bigger place. They knew you could live a life without crime and violence, they just didn’t know how to make it happen. They were well educated, making money, and were respected on the ‘roads’, which gave them a special position. What made life harder for these individuals was the ‘crabs-in-a-barrel’ phenomenon that dominates in deprived communities, where any individual who tries to better themselves and rise above their situation (such as an educated gang member looking for a way out), is automatically pulled back by those they are perceived to be leaving behind (other gang members), as happens with crabs in a barrel.

Whichever type of gang member you consider, one of the main reasons young gang members
commit crime is boredom. Far too many young people today struggle to find constructive things to do with their time, which is compounded by the lack of opportunity affecting our most vulnerable communities. “Idle hands are the devil’s playground.” (Chaucer’s ‘Tale of Melibee’ c. 1386)

**Harrow’s friends**

Many of Harrow’s friends were uneducated and could hardly read or write. They rarely heard any success stories of people making it from communities like theirs and so lived their lives based on what they saw and knew. Education presented a glass ceiling for them, leading them to believe that the world was no bigger than what they knew, and that their options were limited to gang activity. Many people from Harrow’s area did not see the importance of education and how being educated can make a massive difference in your life especially when you are black and from a socially disadvantaged background. Harrow’s friends never knew there was more to education than just physically going to school or college, and that there were other ways to get an education for example apprenticeships and internships. Harrow’s friends never knew that ‘getting a good degree matters more than ever - and those from low income families can no longer easily work their way up from the bottom without the qualifications, contacts and social skills that their more fortunate counterparts make full use of’ (BBC documentary – Who gets the best jobs)

Most of Harrow’s friends went out of their way to meet the ‘elders’ mentioned above to help them to get into the drugs network and make some money.

Many of Harrow’s friends had convictions and went to the local YOT as part of their rehabilitation, but the local YOT was ineffective in their eyes. It never changed any of their negative behaviour, they just learnt how to continue committing crime while ‘keeping off the radar’. Some of Harrow’s friends managed to avoid going to the local YOT, by saying they were too high risk and the YOT was not safe for them to attend because of other gang members. The majority of the YOT workers were scared of Harrow’s friends and did not want to work with them. Many staff members were not trained to deal with gang members so never knew how to deal with them or engage with them, especially the high-profile gang members. YOT was not changing the lives of Harrow’s friends in his area. YOT was just seen as a boring, time consuming, ‘good for nothing’ process you just had to go through when you were convicted of a crime.

Some of Harrow’s friends were remanded in custody or convicted and had to complete their sentences in a Y.O.I prison like Feltham, Cookham Wood, Warren Hill or Ashfield prison. They all had mixed comments on their jail experiences. Some said it was seriously boring, while others said that it was not that bad because a lot of their friends were there with them. Most of Harrow’s friends who went to prison did not see it as a deterrent to stop them from committing crime. They saw it as an enclosed environment where you lost some of your liberties, but one you only stayed in for a while. Some of Harrow’s friends saw serving time in prison as something they could glamourize when they came back
into the community. The majority of Harro's friends were not scared of going to prison but they did not want a lengthy sentence, such as life. Many, however, were willing to take a two-year, five-year, or even 10-year sentence on the chin, especially when they would only do half of it anyway.

A couple of friends Harro grew up with, were serving life sentence tariffs for a murder committed in the area. After a while these friends became 'lost in the system' with almost everyone in the area forgetting about them and moving on with their lives, as if these people no longer existed.

Several of Harro's friends did not respect their parents; some even went as far as beating them on occasions. Many of Harro's friends never had curfews, from their parents or police, unlike Harro who always had to come in early and was not able to attend the local parties at night. Some of Harro's friend's parents (in most cases a single mum) could not control them, often having to call on Social Services for protection.

The majority of Harro's friends' parents, including his own, could not afford to pay for football trials or singing lessons etc. that their child might want. These young people had limited choices because on too many occasions, their parent/guardian just could not afford what they wanted.

Some of Harro's friends were desperate to 'get on the roads' and did not really want to be in school so when they got excluded permanently they were more than happy to become part of a gang. Some knew that their parents (in most cases their mum) could not stop them; the most they could do was just watch and pray for the best. On the other hand, other friends of Harro's knew that they could just manipulate their parents to believe they were not in a gang or doing anything they should not be doing, at least until they were arrested.

Harro, however, did not really want to be on the 'roads', but he wanted money. Harro wanted to be a pilot, even though many of his friends told him he was dreaming if he ever thought he would actually ever become one. Harro always knew he could not be in a gang because his mum would have killed him if she ever found out. Harro was a disciplined child and feared his mum, but after a while the hold his mum had over him faded away as his circumstances got harder.

Several of Harro's friends' parents just accepted the lives their children lived, and some even assisted their criminal lives by hiding weapons or drugs or lying for their children when the police came because they did not want their child prosecuted or imprisoned for the crimes they had committed.

Most of Harro's friends were one or the other of the different types of gang member I have highlighted above. Over time, Harro's gang became his extended family who he loved and cared about.
**Harro’s perception of women**

Harro was promiscuous and slept with many girls, but never had a serious relationship. He was nice to the girls and they found him sweet, unlike some of his friends who would beat some of them up, especially the ones who were their girlfriends. Before Harro was selling drugs and involved in a gang, he never really got much attention from girls and he knew it was because they never thought he was anyone special; he had no money, no status and no respect. This all changed when he started getting money and was around the ‘high status’ gang members. Suddenly girls started to show interest in him and many of them just wanted to sleep with him because he became a ‘somebody’ in the area. Harro knew that girls were just there for the fame and that he could use and exploit them for his sexual needs and to do him favours, like holding his drugs because they wanted to be his ‘favourite’ or his ‘main’ girl.

Harro understood that women were a vital component in gangs because they could possess drugs or weapons that he or his friends could not in their homes, because girls were less likely to be suspected or watched by the police. Harro believed that most girls were gullible and easy to brainwash, and that you could easily use them as a means to an end, without them knowing until it was too late.

During Harro’s time, there were no real ‘sophisticated’ girl gangs at all because no so-called girl gang ever lasted long, unlike some male gangs whose legacy lasted years.

This was because girls, unlike many boys, matured much earlier and realised that they could not possibly maintain the gang lifestyle like the boys did, and last as long. Girls in these gangs also understood they were less tolerated than the boy gangs. It is important to also highlight that these girls in these so-called gangs, emerged when most of them were in secondary school and did not commit crimes which we would call serious violence, such as murder, shootings and supplying drugs, mainly because they would be robbed or attacked by male gang members if they did. Girls who did commit serious youth violence and sell drugs were a very rare exception.

Girl gangs were never seen as a threat to the male community in Harro’s area, even though some assaulted males. They were mainly a threat to the many vulnerable ‘ordinary’ girls who were not involved in a life of crime or trying to imitate the males around them.

There were also girl groups of ‘baby mothers’ of gang members from the same gang, who were all friends, and people saw them as a girl gang. They would commit some petty crimes together, but as friends and not as a gang as such. These girls imitated the behaviour of their male gang member boyfriends or ‘baby fathers’ because they could get away with it because of their partners’ status in the area.

Very few girls would remain connected to gangs as they got older. These girls who still remained visibly close to gangs were targets for rival gangs because they would see them as ‘honey trap’ girls or an important person to attack if they could not find their male rival gang members.
Harro’s understanding of the justice system

Harro always thought that the justice system was corrupt and unfair. He knew innocent people who were wrongly convicted, and guilty people who were wrongfully acquitted. Harro always believed that the wealthier you are, the more likely you were to be acquitted because you could get the best lawyers available who, regardless of the evidence against you, could still ensure you walked free.

Harro had some friends whom he knew were found guilty of crimes they did not commit, but because of their bad character they were found guilty. Trials were not based on evidence or finding out the truth, but on the prosecution and defence arguing about whether the evidence was credible or not. When the prosecution had no concrete evidence, they exaggerated the circumstantial evidence they had and attached it to the fact that the person or people facing trial had a bad character and were capable of doing it anyway.

Harro, like many people in his community, knew that the doctrine of ‘Joint Enterprise’ led to miscarriages of justice and people serving prison sentences because they ‘were guilty by association.’ The ‘Joint Enterprise’ doctrine is hailed as the answer to ending gang culture in Britain, and Harro had a few friends who were convicted of murders that they never committed, because they were ‘guilty by association’ or simply ‘in the wrong place at the wrong time.’

Harro thought that it was unfair that people in his area and across Britain were getting wrongfully convicted on misleading and circumstantial evidence and unexamined intelligence. Bad police practice was being exercised across the force, especially in the Operation Trident unit. Detectives were not trying to ‘solve’ crimes anymore because the ‘Joint Enterprise’ doctrine was so broad, that detectives were just rounding up all the ‘gang members’ they could find and threatening them with murder charges in the hope they would turn against each other, and give the police the evidence against others that they needed and could not get for themselves.

He knew that simply using your mobile phone in the wrong place, or making the wrong call, could lead to a murder conviction, because that is what happened to one of his friends now serving a life sentence. Harro knew a lot of people did not understand ‘Joint Enterprise’, because if they did, they would want the doctrine reviewed because people are being convicted of crimes based on circumstantial evidence and intelligence. The media portray the criminal and justice system as doing a great job and prosecuting offenders, but they are not convicting people fairly based on concrete evidence, as you would expect from the justice system.

What angered many people in Harro’s area, was that many high-profile gang members in the area would be repeatedly arrested but never prosecuted, or convicted and for some strange reason repeatedly issued with NFAs (No Further Action), even when the whole community believed them to be a danger to the public and probably guilty of the offence for which they were arrested.
How the local police treated Harro and his friends

Harro believed the police assumed that all black boys were in a gang, whether they were in hoodies or not. Black people in the area, whether they were in a gang or not, felt that they were disproportionately being stopped because of their colour and that even if they were not doing anything wrong, the police would harass them anyway by stopping and searching them. Black people in the area thought the police were just racist and literally out to get them. Some people in Harro’s area felt that the only way to avoid police harassment was by staying indoors and not being out after dark. Harro knew that not all police officers are actually racist, and that some were actually just doing their job and stopping and searching people for legitimate reasons.

Harro strongly believed the police’s role was to enforce the law and not to provide support services because that is not what they are paid to do. Harro knew people just wanted to see more officers on the streets and not in places like local youth clubs, which could be overseen by youth workers or others in the community. Harro understood that in most cases, if the police stopped you and you never gave them a hard time, then they would not give you a hard time either.

Some of Harro’s friends had distaste for black police officers, because they thought they should be more understanding, obviously not letting them get away with crime, but not to be as hard on them as their ‘racist’ white colleagues. Some of Harro’s friends saw black officers as black self-hating people who were just bootlicking white people and turning against their own.

Harro’s gang life

Harro was nearly attacked on several occasions because of his connection to a gang, also because of the area he was from (Lambeth), and sometimes because people just didn’t like his face. On one occasion Harro was assaulted on the bus (jumped) by a number of youths and was unable to get to safety. He had to tell his mum that the damage to his face and body came from playing rugby. Harro’s mum did not believe him but as she could not prove he was lying, she let the matter slide.

Harro got into several fights and in certain situations he was armed and caused bodily harm to his assailants. Harro knew that on the ‘roads’ it was a ‘dog eat dog world,’ it was a jungle where you had to either ‘eat or be eaten.’ Harro felt he was in a war zone whenever he left his home.

Harro never brought his alter-ego ‘H,’ which is what his friends called him on the ‘roads,’ into his house, and neither could his friends. They all knew how strict Harro’s mum was and that to come inside was a blessing, because for a long time Harro’s friends were not even allowed inside Harro’s home.

Despite Harro being in a gang he still respected his mum. Even though his mum saw changes in Harro in terms of his attitude and the times he was coming in, she never thought he was in a gang. However Harro’s mum did think he smoked, because sometimes he would come home late smelling of cannabis, but Harro denied it and he was really telling the truth because it was the smell of his friends’ drugs on his clothes.
Harro was only in a gang for the money but he knew that he had a covenant with his gang and his friends, which he could not break and which meant they all had to protect each other and that loyalty was compulsory till the end.

Harro gave a lot of the money he made to his mum. She always questioned where he got this money from and Harro would just ignore her, or give her a silly answer like ‘It fell from the sky!’ Harro’s mum knew something was up, but she needed the money so badly she would not complain too much, though she would warn Harro to be careful with whatever he was doing. Like many mothers she was in denial about how her teenage son was earning his money, she was ignorant of how accessible high-risk drug selling was to young people and was no doubt hoping that he was restricting himself to petty crimes.

Harro did not spend as much on himself as he spent on his mum but he bought clothes, trainers, a PlayStation 3, a Xbox 360, all the best rated games for both consoles and an Aqua Master watch which was the ‘coolest watch’ to have at that time. Harro treated his friends and his many girls with gifts every now and then and they loved him for his generosity. Harro saved most of his money and never bought all the expensive ‘bling’ his friends bought which he saw as a waste of money. A few people envied Harro because he had more money than them. They thought Harro believed he was the ‘man’ even though he was far from flashy with his money and always said he was broke, regardless of the fact that everyone knew he was making more money than most people his age group from selling drugs.

Harro thought that by only selling drugs and not hurting anybody by committing unnecessary violence on the streets, nobody would in turn harm him. Little did he know that what some of his friends were doing had negative implications for him and that by selling drugs he was stopping other drug dealers from making as much as they could make, therefore making enemies. For all these reasons he was vulnerable and at risk of serious youth violence, and the longer he was involved in the gang directly or indirectly and in selling drugs, the further he was walking down the path towards long-term incarceration or death.

At the age of 16, Harro was robbed for his drugs at knife-point and was stabbed to death in the process. For all the reasons outlined in this case study, his was a predictable and preventable death. RIP.
A diagram which shows the numbers of people killed in Lambeth during the last five years according to age. Lambeth has been identified as having the highest murder rate of any London borough in the last five years. According to a Freedom of Information (FOI) request by The Guardian newspaper, 79 people were killed in the borough from 2006 to September 2011.
6. Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and extend my heartfelt gratitude to the following persons who have made the completion of this report possible:

Andrew Simpson (St Giles Trust), Carlene Firmin (Principal policy adviser at the Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England), Christ Arena Ministries, Claire Hubberstey (Director of Projects & Partnerships at Safer London Foundation), Farah Damji, Gloria Morrison (JENGbA’s campaign co-ordinator), Joe Morris (Empowering Prospects), Lee Jasper (Community Organiser), Leroy Logan (Superintendent at Olympic Policing Co-ordination Team), Kingsdale Foundation School, Meena Bhatti (Policy Expert), Paul Blake (Producer at Maroon Production), Detective Chief Inspector Petrina Cribb, Professor Tim Newburn (Head of social policy at the London School of Economics and works on the Guardian’s Reading the Riots special project), Rebecca Palmer (Strategic Development Officer at The Mayor’s Children and Young People’s Unit), Sheldon Thomas (Gangsline), Patricia Lamour for support in making my Law Degree a reality. Tunde Okewale (Barrister - Doughty Street Chambers), for their vital encouragement and support.

Dinah Senior, Gwenton Sloley, Professor John Pitts, Junior Shabazz, for all their much needed motivation and all the time they invested into helping me with my report and other agendas.

To my sponsor Jonathan Toy for having the vision to realize that by investing in me he would indirectly be investing in many more like me. And to my mentor and leadership coach Viv Ahmun, for all the tough love, strategic support, critical guidance and advice since I have met them both, and for helping me to begin the process of realising my full potential.

My dearest family and friends, most especially my loving mother Dorah Imafidon, my godfather David Afolabi, my brother George Imafidon, Godfrey Jok, Dean Foster, Leke Anthony, Nigel Verumu, Samuel Bangura, Magdon Olemoh, William Areola, Sodiq Adeojo, and David Nyamupufukudza, for always being there for me through thick and thin and supporting me in everything I do.

And lastly and most importantly, to the almighty God, who preserves my life and makes all things possible.
7. About the author

I am 19 years old and have lived in Peckham, South East London, for most of my life with my mother and younger brother. Many of the people I grew up with have gone to prison, some serving life sentences, and the majority have no formal qualifications and see no opportunities out there for them. In spite of growing up in this environment I have been fortunate and disciplined enough to finish school with 12 GCSEs and to go on to study philosophy, politics, economics and history at A Level.

In May last year, towards the end of my final year at college, I was remanded in custody for a total of seven serious charges including murder, along with four of my closest friends. In spite of this heavy blow, I was determined to take my A levels and fought hard for the chance to do so. In the end I became the first person to do A-levels in Feltham and passed my three subjects, though not with the top grades that had been predicted at school. In November last year I was acquitted of all seven charges made against me, and the weight of the world fell from my shoulders.
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