



Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Gangs and youth crime](#), HC 199

Tuesday 8 July 2014

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Catch 22 Dawes Unit](#)

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Members present: Keith Vaz (Chair), Ian Austin, Nicola Blackwood, Michael Ellis, Paul Flynn, Lorraine Fullbrook, Dr Julian Huppert, Yasmin Qureshi, Mark Reckless, Mr David Winnick.

Questions 75 – 102

Witnesses: **Carol Davies**, Catch22 Dawes Unit, **Tom Sackville**, Catch22 Dawes Unit, **Junior Smart**, St Giles Trust, SOS Project, and **Antoinette Harriott**, St Giles Trust, SOS Project, gave evidence.

Q75 Chair: My apologies, first of all, to all of you, Junior Smart, Antoinette Harriott, Tom Sackville and Carol Davies, for keeping you waiting. The last session overran because of the current situation regarding the child abuse inquiry that the Home Secretary has just announced, and it was the Permanent Secretary who was giving evidence. I am most grateful to you for staying and for contributing to this very important inquiry we have into gangs.

I want to start, if I may, with Mr Sackville and Ms Davies. Can you tell me what the vision behind the Dawes Unit is and how you seek to prevent? Even though this is an inquiry that has not been going on for a great deal of time, we have had some evidence about gangs. We have heard from former gang members. How do you think we should deal with the issue of prevention of people getting into gangs? Tom Sackville?

Tom Sackville: I think it is important that we recognise that this is a complicated problem that doesn't have simple solutions. We need to address the full range of issues that put people at risk of gang involvement and provide real alternatives to what they would get from becoming involved in gangs, whether that is the ability to succeed in school, longer term routes into employment, addressing unmet mental health needs or undealt with trauma from their personal background. It is about a co-ordinated response that brings all of those needs together and also builds on the strengths in those individuals' lives.

Q76 Chair: Carol Davies, you are currently being assessed by the Sheffield Hallam Centre for the work that you have done. What are the benchmarks that they use in respect of the work undertaken by your project?

Carol Davies: I would say that the benchmarks are things like progress that people are making in their lives, being able to make informed changes, being able to engage in more positive routes rather than struggling with the complexities that they are facing daily.

Tom Sackville: Just to add a bit to what Carol was saying, there are a number of different levels to the evaluation that Sheffield Hallam talk about. As Carol said, part of the focus is very much about looking at individuals and the progression that they make against their needs and their plans. It is also looking at things like levels of engagement in education and reoffending, but also looking at—because our work has a policy and research element to it as well—the impact that has on the way that we and others are doing our work. So there are a number of different things.

Q77 Chair: Junior Smart, in respect to the criminal justice system and gangs, from your own personal experience and talking to and dealing with others, what is the way of dealing with a problem that seems to be confronting us, not just in London but all over the country in our major cities, in such a very large way?

Junior Smart: Unfortunately there is no magic single solution. What has worked for us has been an holistic, tailor-made approach. Another thing I have to add is that it is not going to be as simple as taking any ideology anywhere. I don't think that taking any intervention that has happened previously, for example in America, and just transplanting it over here is the solution. What needs to happen is that the solution always has to have the young person, the client, at the centre of what is happening and that solution then has to be tailor-made and adapted to suit that. For example, if we were to move SOS to Birmingham or Liverpool it just wouldn't work because the solution would need to come from the ground roots up. You would need to work with the demographics, the situations and the issues that are affecting the young people on the street level and then adapt the solution to suit them.

I wanted to add one thing around the whole prevention stuff. We have been doing a lot of work through SOS Plus in schools, colleges and community centres, and the idea has been to demystify and deglamourise the reality of gangs to young people. I agree totally with Mr Sackville. However, I would just put a couple of extra things in, and that is the need for teachers to be adequately trained. Often when we are called in, we are not called in by the young people. We are called in by the teachers because they realise far too late that they have got a problem, so there needs to be the right training and support for teachers. There also needs to be adequate funding put in place so that the schools can be adaptive and responsive in coming up with solutions.

Q78 Chair: SOS was your project. Is that because you were part of the system and you wanted to break the cycle of other people being involved?

Junior Smart: Yes. Unfortunately I made some pretty serious mistakes and I was punished for it.

Q79 Chair: How many years were you in a gang for?

Junior Smart: How many years was I in a gang for? Since my mother died. To be honest, I didn't actually keep a tally of it. Some parts I was more in a group of negative associates and some parts I could actually define that as being in a gang because what we were carrying out was criminal activity. But what I do know is that I was living in a dualistic lifestyle and nothing hurt me more than the conversation I had to have with my sisters after my parents had died when I was in custody the morning of my arrest and explain what I had been involved in and having those two roles—the one person that I was to my sisters and my godchildren and the other person that I was to my friends and my peers on the street—come together. It was seeing that and seeing young people starting to kill each other, basically, that got me motivated to make changes.

Q80 Chair: Antoinette Harriott, you also have changed your life around and turned from a life of crime into helping others break the cycle. What made you do that and how are you encouraging others to come out of gang culture?

Antoinette Harriott: I think where I found my teachable moment is when I was in jail and, like Junior said, it is looking at your family. You take your friends that you are around and you think that that is your family and you only care about what they care about, you only want to do what they want to do. On the other side you have got your family who can see that you are going in the wrong way and really care about you but you are not taking their issues and their feelings into consideration. It is a very selfish life that you live. It was just seeing the impact that my past behaviour had on my family, my younger sister and my siblings, and being in prison and looking around me and being like a revolving door prisoner for a while as well. The long sentence gave me the time to reflect on my life, and where were all these friends that I was with? They weren't there, but who was there was my family and my real friends that I had known for such a long time and who had always told me to stay away from it that I had kind of grown out of.

So what I believe very strongly is that I didn't have anybody who was going through the same thing as I was going through to explain to me that, "These aren't the right choices that you are making". I didn't have anybody credible saying it to me. My mum saying to me, "Don't hang around with that group of people" is not really as credible as somebody who has been there, done it and is close to the situation. I think that is the difference with our service and what we offer. So I try to let the young people understand the impact of their behaviour on the outreach in society and that starts off the incentive for change.

Q81 Lorraine Fullbrook: Mr Smart, you were talking about teachers and getting training, because they are currently bringing you in. Who do you think are best placed to give those teachers the training? Is it yourself or your organisation?

Junior Smart: One of the things that we have been fortunate enough to do is set up a training outreach part of the project and we deliver training, believe it or not, to teachers, to barristers even, to police on a number of occasions, around the reality of gangs and what to look for and how to deal with challenging behaviour. But there are other organisations that do it. I think what we bring to the table that is unique and different is that—

Lorraine Fullbrook: You have been there.

Junior Smart: Yes, we have been there and we have also worked in partnership with organisations and they are also quick to work with us, so that has been quite powerful.

Q82 Lorraine Fullbrook: You are a charity. Is that correct?

Junior Smart: Yes. We are under St Giles.

Q83 Lorraine Fullbrook: How do you raise your funds?

Junior Smart: It is quite challenging. Each and every year we spend three to four months of the time that we are working in trying to raise the funds. Sometimes that comes from fundraisers, statutory bodies, contracts, but what we do know is that it is every single year. In some boroughs we have even had people raise the money for us, people who are really passionate to support the project, but that money is not consistent. Every year we need the same amount of money to just continue reaching the young people that we are reaching. One of the things that we don't do is ever close cases; our cases remain open. We never wanted to have a time-bound service. We didn't want to say after six months, "That case has to close", but the problem with that is it is a snowball that is getting bigger and bigger because young people are referred into the service but we always need to make sure there is a service. We are there to meet their needs and that means that we need the same amount of money to just continue as is and slightly more to expand.

Q84 Chair: What is your annual budget?

Junior Smart: We have crossed the £1 million mark in terms of turnover. In terms of the actual workers and the boroughs, we are in 16 London boroughs currently. That means that we employ 23 fulltime members of staff and 10 volunteers. Each worker at the very least can work with about 30 clients a year, and that is our threshold. The workers' threshold is easily 45, 50.

Q85 Lorraine Fullbrook: What do you think your success rate is? I guess it is probably quite a difficult thing to quantify because everybody in a gang is not going to be as smart as you guys—excuse the pun—and have a switch flicked at some stage. What do you think your success rate is?

Junior Smart: Our success rate in figures or in the turnover?

Lorraine Fullbrook: In taking somebody out of a gang and showing them a better way.

Junior Smart: It is really hard to measure. There are two reasons for this. First, evaluations such as TSIP struggle to find a comparative cohort group. From our perspective, and how we know that Ending Gang and Youth Violence rate it, it is by the young person admitting that they have exited a gang, but that means that they have to understand that they were in a gang and be willing to disclose that in the first place. From the third perspective, the fact that we are credible and consistent and are there with tailor-made support for the young person does not actually embody the number of hours that may be invested in helping that young person change, which may be very necessary. There are numbers of our clients where six months or a year of an intervention per se would not have not been enough because it has taken them four or five years to turn that corner, and that is one of the problems with short-term funding. It does not allow for those, and they are hard to reach for a reason.

That is without even taking into account the fourth and most important part, which is that there are soft outcomes as well. If we just measured gang exit, we wouldn't measure the transformation that happens on their families, their brothers and sisters, how much their contribution changed from robbing to giving back to society. It is a very wide spectrum that would have to be evaluated and all of that for us just translates into man and woman hours, consistent work ethic, having the client at the centre of what we are doing and being there with consistent, credible support to that young person.

Q86 Lorraine Fullbrook: How difficult is it for the people you are helping to be extracted from their peer group of gangs? How much aggravation do these people come under from the gang culture that they belong to?

Antoinette Harriott: In Lambeth where I work the gangs are more populated around the Brixton area. The area they populate is very small although the borough is quite big. I find that what happens is that unless a young person is moved out of the borough, it is very hard for them to cross over and dissociate themselves. Like I say to a lot of the young people that I work with, "You may have changed but the people that you used to hang around with haven't changed".

Q87 Lorraine Fullbrook: But those other people give that person aggravation for—

Antoinette Harriott: It is just that the young persons themselves don't feel safe, so it could happen at any point at any time. They always have that fear in the centre of everything they do, so they are more reluctant while in the borough to access services that could exit them fully from the gang lifestyle and dissociate from those types of friends. What happens is that these are young people who have been to primary school together, whose parents know each other, they have been to school with each other, they are related sometimes, so it is hard to just walk away from that environment and that lifestyle. The main problem that I find when I am working with the young people that I work with is trying to get a move into another borough, and housing is very important.

Q88 Mr Winnick: Can I, first of all, associate myself with the apology given by the Chair about your waiting? The responsibility is ours with an oversubscribed programme and it is unfortunate that you had to wait. I notice that as far as the Dawes Unit is concerned you have a pilot site virtually next door to my borough in Wolverhampton. Why was Wolverhampton chosen?

Tom Sackville: There are a variety of reasons, to be honest with you. We looked at areas where there was some evidence that this was an issue within, because clearly there is no point in siting the work we were doing where it was not relevant. But also we were looking for an area that was open to looking at how they did this and potentially doing it differently. We were looking for an area where there was cross-agency buy-in to addressing it so that all the key departments were brought into it. As I said earlier, this is not a simple problem so it can't just be tackled, for example, in the criminal justice silo. It was really important that education, health partners, safeguarding and so on were on board. Wolverhampton presented that opportunity. Given the level of funding that we had, Wolverhampton was also an appropriate size for us, so it fitted a range of criteria that we had established.

Q89 Mr Winnick: How long has that been so as far as Wolverhampton is concerned?

Tom Sackville: We are very fortunate in terms of the Dawes Unit work in that it is funded by a legacy, so it has allowed us to work a little bit differently and maybe to be a bit more experimental in the work we do and to try things. The project is funded for five years. We are just over three years into that work now, hence the evaluation that is in process that will help us to really prove the impact that we have been having in the city.

Q90 Mr Winnick: Ms Davies, you are an approved Wolverhampton safeguarding trainer. Could you explain briefly to us what that involves?

Carol Davies: Basically I deliver safeguarding training citywide. For instance, I deliver training in regard to working with young people who may be at risk from gangs or involved in gang activity to fellow professionals and practitioners, for instance school teachers, youth organisations. I deliver that for the borough.

Q91 Mr Winnick: Are you getting full co-operation from all concerned, local authorities and—

Carol Davies: In regard to attending the training, do you mean? Not as much as I would like, to be fair. I think it could be a lot broader cross-section. I find that schools tend to attend the training more because they need to rather than understanding that it really is a risk with our young people in schools.

Q92 Mr Winnick: Presumably you are working on that problem.

Carol Davies: Absolutely. I deliver gang awareness training, so I will go round to training providers and other organisations and as many schools as possible and go in and

normally deliver a few hour sessions talking about gangs and how it is relevant to their school and the young people they are working with.

Q93 Mr Winnick: As far as the SOS project is concerned, Ms Harriott and Mr Smart, it is rather disturbing to learn from you that gangs are now recruiting in primary schools. Is this a new trend?

Junior Smart: No. To be honest, we have seen this happening I think over the past two years. Certainly my experience is that through SOS Plus, in delivering the prevention, we have been called out increasingly by primary schools. One primary school was on the back of an estate where there was a predominant gang and teachers noticed that the following day after these guys had been in a recruitment process, the kids came in wearing the same colour bandannas tied round their faces. For me that is always horrifying because—

Q94 Mr Winnick: What age would that be in a primary school?

Junior Smart: It was about eight years old. We took over the school for a couple of days. Then a few months later the same occurrence happened again and it was quite shocking for us because I have never seen a young person who gets up and says, “Hey, I want to be a gang member. I want to be a gangbanger” but that is how these gang members recruit and indoctrinate these young people. It is shocking and it is sick. These are young kids who definitely don’t need to be there. They need to be enjoying their childhood and their lives, and that is why we are really passionate about that.

Q95 Mr Winnick: When you come across this very disturbing trend—any gang organisation, gang warfare, gang rivalry is disturbing—like you have been saying of youngsters of eight years of age, are the parents told immediately?

Junior Smart: Yes. We try to bring in the whole community if we can and where it is possible. The good thing about the stuff that we do through SOS Plus is that we are not one of those scared straight programmes. You won’t see SOS Plus workers going in and saying, “We are ex-offenders. Look at where we’ve been”. That is not what we are about. What we are about is imparting real tools to the young people that they can practise immediately and they can use straight away, and also we aim to have an enhanced presence in that school. We don’t just deliver an assembly. We hang around the school until about lunchtime so young people can come and approach us informally with stuff outside of their peers, and it is amazing that every single time we have done that the room has been full to bursting. Young kids really want to find out what the reality is. I have had young people approach me on Facebook saying, “Is this what the reality is? Are you saying it is that easy to get out?” That is what we are dealing with.

We have to remember as well that the very gang nominals that we are talking about, these young people, are not isolated. They have got families; they come from families; they will have younger and older brothers; sometimes many of them will be fathers. We know what the effect of incarceration has on young people and gang involvement.

Q96 Mr Winnick: That is something I wanted to ask you about. Would it be right to say there is a particular pattern where more than likely the father has not taken any role at all?

Junior Smart: I would say that there have been large bodies of research for quite some time that have said that you can put an intervention in place before someone is even born and that is because of the amount of services that are drawn. These families don't emerge from nowhere and there are a number of interventions that are alerted to specific styles and patterns of behaviour, but we need to be asking questions about why these young people are repeatedly falling through the net then and what needs to be done to ensure that does not happen.

Q97 Ian Austin: I would like to ask Ms Davies, I have always wondered why Wolverhampton has a bigger gang problem than neighbouring areas like Dudley where I am from. Why do you think that is?

Carol Davies: I am not sure, to be honest. I don't know whether Tom has any information on that. I am not sure why Wolverhampton has a bigger problem than Dudley. I can only say that I am aware that it has but unfortunately I can't give you a rhyme or a reason.

Q98 Ian Austin: I just wondered if you had any observations. It is something I have always—looking at what I have read of the work that all the organisations have done, the thing that struck me was the work around intensive one-to-one mentoring and the relationship between the key worker and the young person rather than short and shallow interventions by a lot of different organisations. Could you tell us a little bit about that and how important you think that is and why you think that works particularly well? I don't know who wants to—

Tom Sackville: Probably all four us, I should imagine. Maybe if I start and I know Carol will definitely have something to say about it. As an organisation, our methodology is all about strong relationships driving positive change. It is about having consistent, persistent, boundaried individuals who can support those people. Often we are talking about people who have been let down by a number of people in their lives, often from organisations. That links to conversations that have already been had in this room about funding. It is why it is very important that projects are not fly by night, are not here today gone tomorrow, funded for six months, because it takes time to establish those relationships. You can't just walk in and expect people to trust you. You have to build that trust in order to have that impact and that is why it is important that commissioning is done in smarter ways, allowing organisations to develop and to thrive.

To me that is the key in terms of supporting change and allowing us to identify the real issues that underlie why people become involved in gangs and what we can best do about it then to allow us to put the best interventions in place, to use that mentor, key worker, call them what you will, to help the person navigate the complex map that their life often is. You are talking about a person who might have to see a youth offending team worker, an education welfare officer, a child and adolescent mental health worker,

a social worker; all these different individuals who are asking different things of them, or often asking the same things of them in different ways. We see the one trusted individual who can support them to negotiate that as essential in terms of supporting people to achieve change.

Carol Davies: We also find that a lot of our young people, and some of the mums as well that I am working with, have suffered trauma at some point in their lives. When you are dealing with trauma that is a lengthier process; it is not something that can be managed within a few weeks or months. Unless you look at those underlying issues first and start to work with those, you are not going to enable that person to achieve their goals or outcomes. So the longer-term key working is better for somebody, especially if they have experienced trauma, because they can build a trusting relationship with you and feel safe and then are able to make different choices with their life.

Q99 Ian Austin: What will happen to your programme after the five years? You are partway through it now, so in two years' time?

Tom Sackville: One of the advantages of being a pilot programme is that it has allowed us to trial different methodologies. We are developing the evidence in terms of the impact that our work has had and we are looking at ways that we can mainstream and continue that work, ways that we can deliver it in other areas. It is about building different models of delivery. We will be looking to get funding through other areas but we will be looking for that longer—

Q100 Ian Austin: You would want the local authority to be taking it on or the police to be contributing to it or—

Tom Sackville: We would hope that there will be a variety of different routes, but what we would also hope is that commissioning is done a little bit smarter in future. What tends to happen with work of this nature is it is commissioned in silos in the same way that a lot of the work is delivered in silos. For example, there is a small amount of funding that comes through Community Safety, a small amount that comes education, maybe a small amount from the police; bring those sums of money together and allow a much more complex programme to evolve that meets the range of needs that are being exhibited. We would argue that not only should funding be longer term but it should be smarter. The people we work with don't live on borough boundaries. You don't have a young person who lives in Islington and everything they do is in Islington. They live in Islington, their mum lives in Islington, their dad lives in Hackney, they go to school in Barnet and all their mates live in Camden. The idea that we commission in both subject-specific silos and locality silos limits the impact that we can have on this work. The argument we would make is for both much smarter commissioning and much longer-term commissioning in order to allow this work to have an impact.

Q101 Nicola Blackwood: Ms Harriott, you made a certain point earlier about your teachable moment coming when you got a longer-term prison sentence and had time to notice that the people

who turned up were your family and your longer-term friends. We have had previous witnesses on this inquiry who said that they had found that a particular teachable moment for some gang members was when they had been injured and had to turn up at A&E and that perhaps being there at that moment in the NHS to ask gang members to reflect on their lifestyle and the impact on their family was a good time. Thinking about intervention and the most effective moment to try to speak to gang members and ask them to reflect and intervene, in your experience what do you think are the most teachable moments and what should the Government be trying to focus on in our strategy?

Antoinette Harriott: I think there are two examples of most teachable moments for young people: there is near death experience due to serious youth violence or spending a long time in jail and facing a very long sentence, but it is how we approach it while that person is in jail. I could go to jail and sit down for two and a half years and just clean the wing and not do anything and not engage in anything that is going to change my attitude, thinking and behaviour. It is about having programmes inside the jail that are up to speed with what these young people are going through at the moment. I have got young people who are in prison and YOIs who need certain sorts of training, interventions on the wing, working with those young people about the effects of the gangs and stuff like that, in the same way as we look at drugs in prisons. You have therapeutic communities where people go and stay on that community and they develop and talk and discuss about the impact that their taking drugs has had on other people. The same approach needs to be taken with the young people in the gangs in the prison, because all that is happening is it has turned into a place that is breeding more gangs, more hate, more fear and more resentment towards authority, and when they come out they are just a ball of negativity.

In hospitals, there is an organisation that works in Lambeth called Red Fred. They work with young people who have come in on the back of a serious youth violence incident and work with them at their teachable moment and then offer their approach to help them escape from that type of environment.

Those are the two places, but another place is to start early with young people, going into schools, offering more services within youth centres and schools that can help empower the teachers, the youth workers and the prison staff as well to deal with this problem. We all have a responsibility towards making a change.

Q102 Nicola Blackwood: Mr Sackville, in addition to having effective programmes in prison, what would be your recommendations for effective intervention in near death experience situations, so essentially in A&E settings?

Tom Sackville: I would agree with a lot of what Ms Harriott said. It is about organisations that can reach the person at that moment in time. As has already been said, Red Fred is a very good example of an organisation that is embedded within that setting in order to get there.

Picking up the wider point on teachable moments, I think the examples that have been given are really valid and relevant, but the teachable moments are different for different

people and the important thing is knowing that individual. For some people it is a serious injury; for other people it is going into custody; for some it is entering a relationship; for others it is having a child. There are all kinds of different things in people's lives. It goes back to the point that was made earlier about the relationship, because it is the relationship that allows you to know when the teachable moment is for that individual but it is also the relationship that allows them to engage with you when they have that teachable moment so they know where to turn. You are not waiting until necessarily they have had that near death experience or they get that sentence to engage; you are actually in there before. I suppose to a degree the work that we all aim to do is to support people to stop them getting to those teachable moments so that we can identify those people that we know are at risk of gang involvement and provide them with the services that will divert them away from that, developing resilience at a much younger age for example.

Chair: I say to both sets of witnesses, the Dawes Unit and the St Giles Trust SOS, on behalf of this Committee thank you for the work that you do. It is not easy but it is extremely important. Junior Smart, I am very interested personally in talking to your organisation about what we can do for the children of prisoners. I can't think of the number of prisons I have visited where, as Mr Winnick pointed out, their fathers had already been in prison because of being involved in gangs and crime, and we need to break this cycle. We don't do enough for the children of prisoners. They are just left on their own. So, from all of us, thank you for what you are doing. We would like, in this inquiry, to come and meet some of the people you deal with, not all together but individually, because this is going to be a long inquiry and we want to get to the bottom of how to deal with this problem. Please keep in touch with our Clerks because we intend to come and see you, meet you, and we intend to write a report that will be of value to all of you, your members and the country.

Again, my apologies for keeping you waiting. That was the Home Office Permanent Secretary. We will write to him and tell him that you were kept waiting for 45 minutes and if he has got any funding streams he should certainly look to all of you. Thank you very much.