

# Supplementary written evidence submitted by Catch22 Dawes Unit

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Working with individuals, families, schools and communities, the [Catch22 Dawes Unit](#) uses a joined-up approach to reducing the harm caused by gangs. We combine policy and research with service delivery.

## Introduction

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This document provides further information from the Dawes Unit subsequent to our written and oral evidence already provided. Our key messages are:

- **This is a complex problem which needs a multi-agency response.** We need to address the full range of issues that put people at risk of gang involvement; whether that is the ability to succeed in school, routes into long-term employment, unmet mental health needs or undealt trauma. It is about a co-ordinated response that brings together partners from the criminal justice, health, education, the voluntary sectors and the community through effective multi-agency working and smart commissioning.
- **We need real alternatives to gangs.** Whilst preventative schemes, educational programmes and mentoring are essential, there is a tendency to focus on these to the detriment of providing real opportunities for young people such as a job which give them a sense of belonging, independence and legitimate ways of earning money. We understand that this is harder to do, but without support into employment, apprenticeships, or enterprise, gangs will continue to have an appeal. This is something which needs leadership from the Government and must involve real work with employers.
- **Strong relationships drive positive change.** Young people who do not have strong ties to family, school or community are most vulnerable to the sense of belonging provided by being part of a gang. For these young people, consistency and a strong relationship is the key to engaging them. When services lack consistency, when young people are passed from person to person and forced to tell their story again and again, they are unlikely to engage.

## Answers to further questions

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- **The Dawes Unit's development of gang prevention resources for schools - what research base is used and how it will be rolled out**

The two schools programmes we have developed are the Future Leaders, Icons and Personalities (FLIP) programme for boys and the a tailored programme for girls. These are targeted programmes delivered in schools because we know from experience that failure in school significantly increases the risk of gang-involvement. These programmes organise group sessions which support young people in understanding their side of the transaction with schools along with pairing young people up with role models from their community who mentor them. We work closely with families who sign up to work with us as part of the young person's contract. The development of this programme draws on our Catch22's combined experience of delivering education and working with young people at risk. We have delivered this work in three schools in Wolverhampton and are looking to roll this out in the future.

As Dawes Unit research [Whole school approaches to tackling gang involvement](#) shows, whilst prevention programmes are essential, it is also important to look at the issue from a whole school perspective. Research shows that broader factors such as the 'school climate' and 'school connectedness' are also closely linked to gang involvement and must be taken into account.

We believe that schools need to constantly re-evaluate their approach to the issue from a whole-school perspective. This means ensuring that pupils have strong relationships with staff, disciplinary process are clear and transparent, teachers are trained to see the signs of gang involvement and not see it as someone else's problem.

Our research has informed our own practice in schools by informing our practitioners of research findings and recommendations.

- **More broadly, Catch22's research projects and how they feed into the development of an evidence base for the Dawes Unit's work**

The Dawes Unit model is an interactive learning process between the research and practice work. More specifically, the research ensures that there is a solid evidence-base that informs all of the work on the ground. Our policy work also allows us to disseminate and promote the innovative work being done in the Wolverhampton gang intervention project. The Sheffield Hallam evaluation of the programme then adds another layer on to this. Using an action research methodology, the evaluation assesses the research and practice teams and feeds back periodically.

For example, our report [Exit and enterprise: the role of enterprise in supporting young people's gang exit](#) used research on gang desistance along with exploring best practice to make its case. A social enterprise barbershop project was then developed in Wolverhampton to provide young people with the skills to move into employment.

More generally the aim of the research is to influence policy and practice at a national level. Our research on Health and Wellbeing Boards is a good example of this, as we worked with MHP Health Mandate to contextualise gang violence as a public health issue, and then looked at Health and Wellbeing Boards in gang affected areas to establish whether the issue was being prioritised.

In the long-term, the Dawes Unit is aiming to develop the UK evidence base around gang involvement and intervention. Currently the majority of the research on gang involvement and evidence-based interventions come from the USA, and Dawes Unit research is therefore an opportunity to focus on a practice-oriented, UK context.

- **Is there anything you've done that hasn't worked as well as you hoped, or how are you modifying your practice as you go along**

As mentioned in the previous submission, the Dawes Unit is being evaluated by Sheffield Hallam University. This evaluation has an action research methodology which means that evaluation reports are submitted quarterly assessing both the gang intervention project and the research and policy work. We then use these reports as a basis for modifying practice as we go along.

One of the recent modifications has been to bring the service delivery, research, and policy teams closer together to ensure an evidence- and practice-informed approach throughout the unit. All parts of the team have worked closely on specific projects such as our response to this inquiry, which has shown the value of consistent communication between our London

and Wolverhampton offices. One of the key lessons is that constant information sharing between researchers and key workers has improved our work.

We also started the project with a local consultation and mapped the needs of the people in the local area. One key part of the Dawes Unit methodology is the importance of context, and rooting a project in the local area, dealing with local needs. Therefore when the project started we did not merely import a project in to the area already defined. This needs mapping process allowed the project to be shaped to the local context rather than rigidly imposed.

- **Outreach work - how the Unit identifies hot spot areas and how you choose project workers**

Key to understanding Wolverhampton's hotspot areas is to not just focus on police data but take into account a variety of sources and a particular focus on local knowledge. This is where our project workers come in, as they are chosen with regard to their skills and abilities, but also their understanding of Wolverhampton. It was useful to employ people with local knowledge and desirable to employ those already embedded in local networks with existing relationships in the community. People from outside the community, however, might bring new ideas and experience, and may have similar experiences, just in another city. These staff can learn local information through training and induction and new relationships on the ground. A combination of these factors puts the project workers in the position to combine a variety of sources of data and understanding, this provides the basis of project success. In terms of identifying hot spot areas, this builds on these relationships and shared information sources. Hot-spot areas can change rapidly, however, and consistent communication is necessary which is built on strong working relationships with the police, other local agencies, and with young people. Care must be taken to ensure that key workers remain trusted by all groups.

- **The Dawes Unit's work in prisons, relationships with prison authorities**

Catch22 works with Serco in HMP Thameside and Doncaster so we are well integrated into both of these prisons. Currently Catch22 runs a gang intervention project within Thameside prison, a unique project in that Catch22 is based inside the prison. This project involves project workers who interview all prisoners as they arrive at Thameside, identify those that are gang involved and use this to inform all placement decisions. Project workers work one on one with all gang involved prisoners, and are differentiated from prison officers as they don't wear a prison uniform. They also conduct group work with gang involved prisoners to work on their beliefs and values. This project has allowed the Catch22 project workers to become a point of contact in the prison for gang issues, and having expert-workers with specialist gang knowledge has allowed staff in different parts of the prison establishment to work together more effectively around this issue.

The Dawes Unit team has recently completed a piece of research in partnership with the Thameside project. This report will be published later in the year and we hope to use this research to inform policy and practice nationally as well as using it to guide the work of Catch22 within the Dawes Unit and more widely. On the basis of this report and our work in Thameside, Catch22 will develop a model of delivery for gang work in prisons.

- **The realities of life as a caseworker - how long you spend with each young person each week, the duration of time you spend on each case**

The core principle of key working within the Dawes project is that it depends very much on the individual. Rigid targets on how much time is spent with each young person per week can often reflect what is convenient for the service rather than what that young person needs. Case working is therefore flexible and based around the young person to suit their needs. Building a relationship with a service user is the single most important step in enabling change to happen.

In general, services users receiving support from key workers will have face to face contact once a week or every other week, but will be in contact frequently, even daily, through phone-calls and text messages. For example, work with a mother of a gang involved young person involves almost daily calls and text messages, meetings with the Youth Offending Team, teachers, housing officers, the police and other agencies involved. Support has even involved appearances at court and help with GP appointments.

Flexibility is also essential to working in a trauma-informed way. This means addressing underlying issues and supporting people to regulate their emotions and reinstate their personal boundaries. For example, in dealing with adolescent and parent abuse, a lot of emotional support is needed to help a parent manage issues such as self blame and the lack of understanding often shown by others.

### **Case study**

*This is a case study of a mother we have worked with whose son was involved in gangs. We have given this case study to show that gang work must not only work with young gang members, but also provide support whole families and communities.*

When Janet [name changed for confidentiality] Came to the Dawes Unit, her son had been excluded and was involved with a gang. Social Care had open cases on her children, and she was at that time unemployed and needed support to get things back on track.

The Dawes Unit has now supported her for a year, and during that time has provided support to both her and her son. The flexible support provided to Janet was both practical and emotional which led to her getting a permanent job, and being trained to become a school governor. She now generally feels much better about herself which has had a positive impact on her family life.

She has also been able to deal with her son being excluded get him back into mainstream school. He now has his own key worker and is back in school full time. Due to the changes made, Social Care has now closed the cases on both her children.

Janet is eager to volunteer within a mothers group that the Dawes Unit are setting up which will allow her to support others and sustain the changes she has made.

- **As a caseworker on female empowerment projects for gang-affected girls, the goals and preliminary results of your projects**

The Dawes Unit girls' empowerment project is aimed at reducing the risk of gang involvement and association for girls. The projects work with those at risk of gang involvement to enable girls to build on and identify their own strengths, make informed choices, identify abuse and be aware of who and how to contact support.

Groups take place in both schools and community settings and general methods include looking at positive role models, stereotyping, healthy relationships, aspirations, abuse and risky behaviours. However, the material is flexible and will be tailored to include more

specific areas looking at the consequences of gang involvement, sexual exploitation and safety depending on the group.

The overall evaluation by Sheffield Hallam will bring together evidence on soft and hard outcomes for those supported by the Dawes Unit. However, preliminary evaluation of the school-based project shows an improvement in how the girls feel about their abilities and themselves. It also shows an improvement in their ability to identify what the areas they wish to work on. Weekly evaluations of the community project also show a greater understanding of the importance of self belief and aspirations.

- **How the Dawes Unit addresses mental health issues**

We work with local and national partners who have particular expertise on mental health issues. One example of this is [MAC UK](#) whose Chief Executive has become Catch22's first Fellow. We are helping her scale up her organisation and she has provided expertise on how to provide an integrated model that helps young people with mental health issues.

- **The biggest challenges for helping people move away from gang crime**

Many young people who are involved with gangs see this involvement as a rational choice in the context of a lack of opportunities for their future. For young people in areas with high levels of unemployment and low aspirations for the future, becoming involved with a gang which provides belonging, status, respect, and in some cases money has a real appeal. The challenge in supporting these young people is providing a pathway into the future and realistic aspirations and understanding of how to get there.

While the Dawes Unit can engage young people, provide role models and raise their aspirations, real alternatives in the form of training and employment opportunities are needed to create sustainable change. Often there are significant barriers here if young people already have convictions, so work also needs to be done with employers, and supported apprenticeships provided to allow young people to take advantage of opportunities.

The young people and families supported by the Dawes Unit have often been let down by people in the past and may find it difficult to trust support workers easily. Gaining trust and creating strong relationships is essential to drive change and can be a significant challenge. The length that a project is up and running is the key factor here, as time and persistence are often the only ways to break down these barriers.

Also, given that these young people are often facing the hardest of problems (homelessness, no families, poverty, to mention a few), practical work must consider that relapses (i.e. young people turning away from services) are normal and that young people might disengage, but it is the trained key worker's job to address that relapse and bring them back on board. This is where there is a real need for determination, and it highlights why we need long-term programmes – relationships which lead to change take time to build and maintain.

As mentioned in the key messages section above, this is a complex problem which requires a multi-agency solution. An effective response therefore has to bring together partners from criminal justice, health, education, the voluntary sector and the community through effective multi-agency working. This is a key challenge for any work in this area, as this requires agencies to have a joint understanding of what the problem is, share data effectively and mobilise all parties around the issue.

- **Funding challenges**

There are two key challenges that gang intervention projects face in terms of funding. The first is around short term funding, which does not allow projects to become embedded for long enough to make real change. The Dawes Unit has been fortunate in that the current project in Wolverhampton is funded by a legacy which runs for a period of 5 years. This length of time is enough to make relationships and raise a profile in the community, both creating and embedding change that has a chance of being sustainable.

Another key challenge faced by all projects working in this sector is the narrow nature of funding streams which are bounded by Local Authority borders as well as narrow topic silos. Gang involvement affects the whole community, and risk of involvement with gangs comes from a young person's environment, their school, their family, and a number of other factors.

## **More information**

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If you have any further questions, please contact our public affairs officer Alvin Carpio at [alvin.carpio@catch-22.org.uk](mailto:alvin.carpio@catch-22.org.uk) / 020 7336 4820.

# Appendix

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## Our research

Catch22 Dawes Unit research addresses the problems caused by gangs and explores how best to prevent gang involvement and support those looking to exit. Research so far has focused on:

- **Communities,**
- **Education,**
- **Employability,**
- **Families,**
- **Health, and,**
- **Healthy relationships.**

The following outlines key findings of our reports which might be useful to the Committee's inquiry. The key message is that gangs cannot be dealt with in silos and that all government departments have a role to play in dealing with gangs.

## Communities

We published a report, "[Mobilising communities to address gang violence \(July 2013\)](#)", which looks at what is meant by community mobilisation, why it matters in preventing and reducing gang violence and at 12 common elements of effective approaches. Communities have long been recognised as playing an important part in building resistance to gangs and suppressing gang violence.

Key findings include:

- although community mobilisation has been identified as needing to run through every strand of work to tackle gangs, this is in practice still relatively rare
- to be effective, mobilisation needs to involve genuine collaboration between local residents, community groups, businesses, public agencies and others working to achieve a common purpose, and have a shared understanding and respect for each party's contributions
- mobilisation works best when there is a range of opportunities to be involved, when people understand the part they can play, and when violence is not seen as inevitable
- more needs to be done to build understanding of what works in shifting attitudes that consider or are at risk of considering violence as normal
- the current strong policy focus on community mobilisation creates many opportunities that can potentially be harnessed to tackle gang violence – but more work needs to be done to bring the agenda together and support community mobilisation in areas hit hardest by gangs.

## Education

Currently most gang prevention and intervention work in schools is focused on short-term, targeted, group work programmes. Our report, "[Whole school approaches to tackling gang involvement \(February 2013\)](#)", indicates that creating a positive 'school climate' and nurturing young people's sense of attachment and commitment to school can also have a powerful effect on protecting against gang involvement.

Key findings include:

- schools have a role to play both in preventing gang involvement and providing interventions to gang-involved young people;
- at present, gang prevention and intervention work in schools tends to be short-term, targeted group work, with less attention paid to the school environment;
- this is despite evidence suggesting that creating a positive school environment and nurturing young people's attachment and commitment to school can play a powerful role in protecting against gang involvement;
- spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is closely related to school climate and the sense of connection to school; working on SMSC can help to create a positive environment that protects pupils at risk of gang involvement.

## **Employability**

Our report, "[Exit and enterprise: the role of enterprise in supporting young people's gang exit \(September 2012\)](#)", explores the extent to which enterprise – ranging from established multi-million pound to youth-led enterprises – can assist with gang exit, an area of critical importance, especially when considered in alignment with the current labour market. The report also looks at what resources are currently available, and what can be learnt from using enterprise in an effective way.

Key findings include:

- finding employment, particularly if the work opportunity coincides with other turning points in a young person's life, may help to facilitate gang exit
- social enterprise may have a role to play in creating employment opportunities for young people and making the most of their entrepreneurial talents
- examples from both the UK and abroad indicate that social enterprises not only create opportunities for young people but also encourage and support them to set up their own enterprise
- it is possible to identify the critical success factors in these approaches, including the need to provide support and a wide range of opportunities while ensuring a sustainable and competitive business model that offers a real alternative to gang involvement.

## **Families**

We have produced a number of reports related to families including:

- [The Catch22 approach to working with families of gang-involved young people \(July 2013\)](#), a policy paper drawing on research conducted by London Metropolitan University, along with the experience of Catch22's work with young people and their families, outlining new ways of working with the families of gang-involved young people, including specific recommendations for practice.
- [The role of the family in facilitating gang membership, criminality and exit \(June 2013\)](#), prepared with London Metropolitan University, this report examines the role of the family in gang formation, criminality and gang exit in order to inform best practice for practitioners working with gang-involved families.

Key findings include:

- while the root cause of gangs is generally held to be unstable or 'problem' families, people who associate with or who are in gangs come from all types of family and experience multiple difficulties that precede gang involvement;
- while gang members may experience family life as difficult, most view the decision to become part of a gang as their choice. And while relatives can play a role in encouraging and supporting gang exit, the decision to leave is made primarily by the gang member themselves;
- the approach to dealing with beleaguered families needs to be very different; current approaches to gang intervention need to be challenged and the assumption that the 'problem' family is the root cause of gangs needs to be contested.

## Health

The Catch22 Dawes Unit and MHP Health wrote, "[Violence prevention, health promotion: a public health approach to tackling youth violence \(October 2013\)](#)", a report which provides the first comprehensive analysis of the extent to which new Health and Wellbeing boards are recognising youth and gang violence as a public health concern. The analysis focuses on the 33 areas of the country, 60% of which are in London, identified by the Government as having the most serious problems associated with gang and youth violence.

Key findings include:

- there are benefits to treating gang and youth violence as a public health issue, as recognised in [Ending gang and youth violence: cross-government report \(2011\)](#);
- Health and Wellbeing Boards, established April 2013 and central to the government's reforms to the local public health landscape, appear to be acknowledging gang and youth violence as a public health issue – although this is not yet being translated into strategic planning decisions;
- while only a minority of Boards include data from the five relevant indicators in the Public Health Framework, there is evidence that boards are expanding the data they collect in this area;
- there is clear partnership among some Health and Wellbeing Boards and the criminal justice community, although in the majority of areas there is not yet a criminal justice representative on the Board;
- there are some examples of Boards implementing good practice in developing a public health approach to tackling youth violence in terms of local investment and commissioning decisions, although this is not yet widespread.

## Healthy relationships

The Dawes Unit was commissioned by the Metropolitan Police to evaluate HEART: a programme designed to reduce the risk of young women either committing or being subject to serious violence, particularly gang-related and sexual violence.

You can find the report [here](#).

Key findings include:

- young people are likely to experience sexual violence, coercion and exploitation in their relationships, with some young people being particularly vulnerable;
- the Healthy Relationships Training (HEART) pilot programme model, designed to support young people to develop healthy relationships with peers and prospective partners, has the potential to achieve positive outcomes for young people including a change in behaviour;

- the value of using external providers in programme delivery, including projects workers and volunteers with personal experience, is central to success;
- working with boys and learning about sex in the context of healthy relationships is key to address sexual exploitation of girls.