



# Young People's Safety Group

## Evaluation Report

26th February 2009



## **1) Introduction**

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham held its second Young People's Safety Group meeting on Thursday 26th February 2009 at Castle Green. The forum's purpose is to provide regular opportunities for young people aged between 11-19 to give their views and opinions on how safe they feel in the borough.

The agenda was focused on Knife Crime. The young people were given an opportunity to put forward their solutions on how to solve the issue. The group heard from former prisoner Shahid Syed (New Destiny Trust) about his criminal experience. Kellie-Ann Fitzgerald updated the group regard Barking and Dagenham's response to the Baby P case.

The forum was very well supported with 40 young people attending, representing the following institutions;

- All Saints
- Eastbury
- Jo Richardson
- Sydney Russell
- Lifeline Institute
- Lifeline Young Consultants

Each school was invited to send between 6-8 pupils from their school council, so there would be a direct feedback mechanism to the whole school.

## **1) Week of Peace**

Pastor Ade from the Peace Alliance spoke to the group regarding the 'Week of Peace', which will be held in September 09 and the plans the Peace alliance have for the week. Pastor Ade informed the group about the intention to have Peace Ambassadors recruited amongst the pupil population within each school. He informed the group that Sydney Russell already has Peace Ambassadors in their school and the role they play within the school is to promote peace amongst students. During the last Week of peace the Sydney Russell Peace Ambassadors wore anti-knife crime t-shirts with the slogan 'choose life not a knife'

The plan is to host an anti-knife debate at the Young people's safety group in September during the Week of peace.

The young people in their groups were given the following task 'If you were the borough commander what would you do to reduce knife crime'. The young people were asked to feedback their top 3 ideas. The list below outlines their responses.

### **Knife Crime Workshop**

- Harder punishment- Use of punishment from Police
- Higher Education in consequences- Prisons, Victims, their future
- More powerful advertisements of the consequences of knife crime and what they could be like if they didn't take a knife- like the drink advert!!!
- Public Humiliation-Wall of shame saying who they are and what they have done. Mug shots!!!
- More camera's in Hotspots. Neighbourhood Watch. More street lights. Clean up places so they look nicer and feel more open and safer.
- Try to reduce attitudes of stereotyping- i.e. Hoodies=Danger
- Acknowledge young people more. Stop giving them a negative image. Youth could be doing crime for attention- Make them feel loved in society
- Open Prison visits (trial period)
- Presentations about victims of Crime
- Talk to Parents/Educate parents
- Curfew (Young Offenders)
- Cigarette Packet Idea (re: consequences) i.e. what a knife can do.
- More power, training, funding for Police > Fitness

- Engagement training
- Community Leaders
- Plain clothes Police Officers
- Metal detectors/Camera's in Public areas
- Police outside nightclubs
- Don't approach dangerous people, go away and tell someone
- Ex offenders educating students in school
- Stop and Search in Schools
- Casual dressing- bullet proof vest underneath clothing. (Intimidated by Police uniform)
- Being victimised because of the way you dress.
- Encourage youth by using other youth (Peer mentoring)
- Have Peace ambassadors in more schools
- Youth clubs designed by youth (Other people)
- Research others that have used knives and ask them why?
- Search for the root of the problem
- More Police Officers
- Have a private amnesty in all schools where people can hand in their weapons.

## **2) Crime and Consequence- Shahid Syed**

At the first young people safety group, the young people mentioned that they would like to hear directly from someone who had been through the criminal justice system. Shahid Syed was invited along to do just that and talk to the young people about his experience and how he has turned his life around.

Shadid explained to the young people that the reason why he does his workshops is because he aims to get a positive message across to young people. Shadid asked the young people why they think other young people carry knives and the responses were:

- Boost Self esteem
- They are cowards

- Broken homes

- Anger
- They feel unsafe
- They want respect
- Reputation
- Protection
- Ego/Bravado 'Look hard'

The group were asked, why do young people feel its ok to carry weapons? The answer that they were given is because other young people do not challenge their friends who they know carry knives. Young people are more inclined to be in awe of someone who carries a knife as opposed to being disgusted. Shadid told the group that need to be prepared to be honest with their friends who do carry weapons and let them know in his words that they're a 'Mug'.

Young people these days sometimes find themselves in trouble because they are too quick to resort to violence, because they lack the debating skills and reasoning to solve their problems amicably. Problems tend to escalate as friends call friends and before you know it the problems got out of hand. The group were urged to speak to their parents/carer's, teachers or a Police officer if they are facing a difficult situation they did not know how to handle.

Shahid spoke about today's 'Youth culture' and young people's willingness to criminalise themselves by carrying weapons.

Although knives are used today as kitchen utensil's the original purpose of a knife, was too kill. The group were informed that the knife was invented by the Stone Age Man and it had one purpose which was to kill. The young people agreed that the knife is a killing machine. Shahid asked the young people that if a knife is designed as a killing machine, how is it that young people want to carry it for protection. He told the group of the 28+ young people who were fatally stabbed in London last year 40% died by their own knife.

When asked 'how many people here know someone who carries a knife' half the group raised their hand (roughly 28 persons).

Shadid spoke about his experience with the law and informed the young people about how he got caught storing cocaine and a gun with a silencer for his friends. At the time Shadid worked in the city and wasn't involved in crime. The Police were surveilling his friend and that subsequently lead to his house and garage being raided. He spoke about how he was stupid enough to play with the gun and got caught up in the moment and left his finger prints on the gun. When he called his friend to move the gun and drugs, his and his families' lives were threatened. The moral of the story was that the young people should be loyal to themselves and be selfish to their future. Shadid although he did not own the gun or sell drugs was convicted of possessing a fire arm and possession of drugs, as they were on his person.

### **3) Dealing with Knife Crime – Ivan Hayes, Met Police**

Ivan introduced a new project around Knife Crime. If you know someone with a knife, you can name them by texting 88551. The text can't be traced and will be charged at your standard network rate. Some of the young people felt that the text would not work unless it was free.

#### **4) Baby P – Kellie Ann Fitzgerald**

Kellie Ann Fitzgerald opened a discussion with the young people about what they had seen and heard in the press about Baby P.

Questions asked included:

1. Why did nobody clean the chocolate of the baby's face?
2. Why did the right people not talk to each other when we already knew how important that was following Victoria Climbié?
3. How could anybody hurt a baby in that way?

The group discussed the role of a Social Worker and the kinds of difficult decisions that they have to make. One young person described how they would not like to be taken away from their parents under any circumstances. The group agreed that what children wanted social workers to do was to 'stop harm from happening in the home' not to remove children. The young people felt strongly that if children are repeatedly seen to have bruises – then there is no other choice but to find them a safe place to stay away from their family.

Kellie Ann told the group following the Baby P case, a list of recommendations were made to make sure that other children were not harmed. She described how Children's Social Care Teams in Barking and Dagenham had looked at the recommendations and used those to make sure that the children we are taking care of are not at risk of similar harm.

The group also discussed very unhappy or very unwell people and how difficult it was for anyone to believe that people harm their own children and how sad that must be for the children themselves.

Kellie Ann described the different ways that professionals and practitioners work together in Barking and Dagenham to share information and protect children.

#### **5) What happens next?**

This report will be sent to all the members of the Young People's Safety Group; Teachers and School Police Officers and the Metropolitan Police. The report will be presented to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board for agreement and to look in-depth at the issues raised by the young people.

The next meeting of the Young People's Safety Group will be June 5th 2009.