

**“WIELD  
WORDS –  
NOT  
WEAPONS”**

**Young People’s  
Proposals to  
Tackle  
Youth Crime,  
Knives and Gangs**

**The Views of Young People on:**

- **The Impacts of Youth Crime, Knives and Gangs**
- **The Causes of Youth Crime - Why is it happening?**
- **What should be done to tackle Youth Crime, Knives and Gangs - In Your Area?**

# APRIL 2008

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Developing a Community-led Approach: [www.communityactionteam.com](http://www.communityactionteam.com)

## **'WIELD WORDS - NOT WEAPONS'**

This Action Plan was put together by young people in the London Borough of Waltham Forest, with support from the Community Action Team (CAT). We firstly showed our concerns with regard to youth crime, knives and gangs, explaining what is going on in our neighbourhood; we then showed the causes of these problems - the reasons why they are occurring; and finally we showed our solutions - the actions that are required to tackle the problems we experience.

Whilst crime has generally fallen across London in recent years, youth crime is a very complicated problem - being also very closely linked to drugs - and both these issues have been more difficult to tackle. As this Action Plan includes many recommendations, we have prioritised the Actions that we, as a Youth Group, will take; and we have also prioritised some 'quick wins' - Actions that the statutory agencies can implement within the next three to six months.

This Action Plan should be read in conjunction with the CAT Report '*A Community Safety Plan for Young People*', published in March 2008, which can be downloaded on the CAT website: '[www.communityactionteam.com](http://www.communityactionteam.com)'.

### **Our Priorities** - involving young people in our Youth Group, we will aim to:

- (i) Develop and implement an 'Early Intervention Programme' with a group of vulnerable primary school children, who are at risk of involvement in crime and youth gangs.
- (ii) Target the Acacia area, where the 'AC' and 'OC' groups are linking up, aiming to involve young people, parents and residents in a crime reduction project (including fathers and male role models).
- (iii) Make links with management at 'The Click' internet café and Cathall Leisure Centre, aiming to make these venues more accessible to young people.
- (iv) Develop a programme of exciting activities, aimed at involving vulnerable young people in the area, including a music project.
- (v) Investigate ways of improving the provision of alternative study/training courses for young people in the area.
- (vi) Publicise young people's rights concerning 'Stop and Search' by the Police.
- (vii) Aim to develop an 'Anti-Gang Strategy', so that schools can discourage young people from getting involved in youth gangs.

## Short-term Priorities for the Police and the Council:

The following Actions could be implemented within the next three months:

1. The council and the police should show how they are identifying and targeting resources at young people who are actively involved in crime in the area e.g. encouraging them into positive activities through outreach work and also reducing their involvement in criminal activities.
2. The Council should show how it is co-ordinating youth activities in the area, ensuring that resources are being used effectively - and the wide range of youth activities available should be promoted and widely publicised among young people and parents.
3. The police should show how they are addressing problems at known hotspots in the area - including after dark.

Problems and Causes	Young People's Solutions - Actions
<b>Violent Culture/Way of Life</b>	
Conflicts based on estates/ postcodes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Talk to people who are in the gangs, visit youth clubs</li> <li>Outreach work: talk to youths/gangs on the streets - where they meet up, use someone they respect</li> <li>Introduce a truce between gangs in different areas - mediation and conflict resolution at neutral venues: identify two estates for pilot project, talk to youth workers on Beaumont, Priory Court and Boundary Estates</li> </ul>
Drugs: including recently, crack cocaine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raise awareness of drugs among young children, let them know the dangers</li> <li>Stop selling drugs, cigarettes to young people</li> <li>Put drug dealers in jail</li> </ul>
Alcohol - not such a problem with young people in the area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stop selling alcohol to young people in off licenses, local shops</li> </ul>
Disrespect/insults (also to sister, mother etc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can't stop this, it happens</li> </ul>
Young people carrying knives or guns - either for self defence or for aggressive reasons - either way, they won't give them up voluntarily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need to get young people involved in positive stuff: courses, apprenticeships, earning money - take away the need/opportunity for aggression</li> <li>There should be places to get rid of weapons, with no questions asked e.g. youth clubs, safety bins</li> <li>Parents should make sure their children are not carrying weapons</li> </ul>
Easy availability of guns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stop weapons coming in: find out what is being done to stop weapons coming in - it is not succeeding</li> </ul>
Lots of street robberies/mugging: It happens all the time at hotspots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is for easy money. Get boys involved in courses and apprenticeships - things they enjoy doing, so</li> </ul>

(Bakers Arms, Tescos, and Walthamstow Central) but is almost never reported to the police for fear of reprisals. Boys do it to build their reputation and for quick money, to buy something they want. In South Leytonstone many of the boys already have their rep, they get their money from drugs, don't need to do it.	<p>get them involved in developing the schemes. Also, make sure they earn some money from the course. Keep them occupied, doing stuff they enjoy, have some music sessions at a studio. This needs to happen in Year 9 (age 13-14) as many young people start getting involved at this age</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need some role models to inspire young people</li> </ul>
Lots of bullying, ganging up on people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should talk about this at primary and secondary schools (not such a problem on the streets around here?)</li> </ul>
Violent TV and computer games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss issue at primary schools</li> <li>• Provide positive activities at after school clubs - drama, dance etc</li> <li>• Talk to the parents, stop them buying games for young kids</li> <li>• Make sure the shops stop selling violent computer games to young kids (new government legislation?)</li> </ul>
Revenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can't be stopped, nothing can be done about this: need to stop attacks happening in the first place</li> </ul>
Gang-related graffiti	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy - remove gang-related graffiti in 24 hours</li> </ul>
Youths with dogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring in a new byelaw: put dangerous dogs on leashes</li> <li>• Build up a register of young people likely to use dogs for violence, take them away when there is enough evidence</li> </ul>
Racism and stereotyping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Asian community is most directly affected by racism. Stereotyping on Black young people in the area is a big problem - especially by the police, who can arrest you, put you in a cell</li> </ul>
A lot happens after dark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build up a map of trouble spots, patrol after dark</li> <li>• Parents should keep their kids in after dark - they might need support to keep discipline</li> <li>• Have police patrols at night at the hotspots</li> </ul>
Lots of fights and violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zero tolerance: harsher treatment for perpetrators, inc. curfews</li> <li>• Be stricter on young people wearing tags - make sure they stay at home, don't go out and cause trouble - and they should do community service, make themselves useful, clean graffiti, visit old people, learn about responsibility</li> </ul>

### Reasons for Joining Gangs

What could persuade young people to leave gangs: any role for parents?

Status: looking tough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early intervention programmes at primary school can involve young people at risk in discussions about status - develop young people's minds so they don't turn to crime</li> <li>• [What about involving parents in discussions?]</li> </ul>
Safety, security, self-defence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estates need to be made safer: focus on boys who are causing trouble. The police should know who they are and it should be made as difficult as possible for individuals to get up to no good. But they also need to be diverted into positive projects that they develop - this takes time and resources.</li> </ul>
Music glorifying gangs - rapping/ spitting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use music from people who have turned away from gangs</li> <li>• Work with local churches</li> </ul>
Peer pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early intervention programmes at primary school can involve young people at risk in discussions about dealing with peer pressure</li> <li>• Peer mentors can show younger children how they turned away from crime and gangs</li> </ul>
It is fun/exciting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth workers need to do outreach work, develop relationships, so that the boys get involved in developing exciting projects and they value the activities e.g. trips, talent shows, festival etc</li> </ul>
Easy money (e.g. from drug dealing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are motivated by money - they need jobs that pay well! But also, there should be some kind of voucher payment scheme for positive activities and maybe also designing local facilities, like a chill out zone/shelter in a park</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are many reasons why young people join gangs - and once they are involved, it is almost impossible for them to leave, even if they want to. Therefore, early intervention is essential - before they join gangs.</li> <li>• This means intervening in primary schools, with someone young people would respect (who has been there, done that), discussing the reality of gangs and supporting pupils to develop local anti-gang strategies. Young people at risk of joining gangs should be identified: they often have a negative attitude to work, they don't want to co-operate, are aggressive (swearing, bullying). They should have a mentor/buddy, they should be involved in developing rules at school re. conflict, fights and they should be given a positive role in developing projects that they can be proud of. The mentor must be reliable and trustworthy.</li> <li>• They should be rewarded for good behaviour (trips at weekends?) and parents should be involved in discipline for bad behaviour.</li> </ul>

- Outside school, there should be a drop-in centre, where under 13's can relax and get involved in positive activities, talent shows, trips out, award schemes etc and where there is a 'Discussion Hour', where community safety and anti-gang strategies can also be developed. This is needed urgently!

**Lack of Youth Activities**  
**Involve young people in developing a programme of activities (CAT Recommendation)**

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| Boredom/lack of youth activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more - and better - youth activities and youth centres</li> <li>• Target activities at kids in trouble</li> <li>• Have a music project that allows hem to be creative</li> <li>• Have a chill zone</li> <li>• Open up a cyber café: meet management at The Click</li> <li>• Have computer games in clubs</li> </ul> |
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| Nowhere to go/no publicity about youth activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publicise youth activities in the area</li> <li>• Make use of empty buildings</li> <li>• Outreach to disaffected young people - involve them in developing programmes.</li> </ul> |
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**Parents and Carers**

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| Lack of parental involvement and care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents should take more care of their children, get more involved - show them the 'Dispatches' documentary</li> <li>• Set up Parent Support Groups to provide mutual support and help improve parenting (CAT Recommendation)</li> <li>• Involve parents (and young people) in making YISP and Parenting support Service more accessible</li> <li>• We should meet with parents, show them statistics and how much children at primary school know about gangs - get their side of the story, have people there who have been affected by drugs and gangs</li> </ul> |
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| Lack of discipline amongst young people | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents should take better care/discipline their children - get them involved in positive activities, warn against crime, gangs etc</li> <li>• Parents should keep their kids off the streets and indoors after dark</li> </ul> |
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| Some parents have given up, they let their kids sell drugs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents should be more active</li> <li>• Parents should stop their kids smoking and make sure they're not involved in violence</li> <li>• Need to distribute information to parents</li> </ul> |
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| Family breakdown | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although some gang members come from settled families, others often have absent fathers and no male role model to tell them if they are doing wrong.</li> </ul> |
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There should be a Fathers Project, with a club, encouraging dads to stay close to their sons - starting at birth.</li> </ul>
Problems at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overcrowding, difficult relationships at home etc can be very unsettling. Learning Mentors often do a great job and Connexions Personal Advisors should also be closely involved on a one-to-one basis.</li> <li>• Family counselling is also essential.</li> </ul>

**No community involvement in the area**  
Get the community involved - residents should be more active

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have an estate meeting or conference</li> <li>• Put out newsletters, information</li> <li>• Set up anti-gang groups</li> <li>• Set up Neighbourhood Watch: residents should report incidents</li> <li>• Improve the local environment/park</li> <li>• Have more community events [e.g. talent shows]</li> <li>• Residents should get involved in youth projects</li> <li>• Council to provide resources for Cathall Community Safety Group, to enable it to take a more pro-active role (CAT Recommendation)</li> <li>• Council and police to consider similar Community Safety Plans in other areas (CAT Recommendation)</li> </ul>
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Nosey neighbours - reporting young people for no reason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treat young people with more respect, talk to them, stop stereotyping young people</li> </ul>
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**Policing/Security: More effective policing**

Police stereotype Black young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop stereotyping young people. the police don't understand young people - each officer should go into schools for Q &amp; A Sessions, so they understand why many young people don't like the police</li> </ul>
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Some police are racist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We should tell the police how we feel</li> </ul>
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Police harass young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less assumption by police, they should only move young people on if there is good reason</li> </ul>
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Police stop and search for no good reason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have information sessions: Know Your Rights on Stop and Search</li> <li>• Police should provide statistics to young people on Stop and Search in the area</li> <li>• Police should only Stop &amp; Search for good reason</li> </ul>
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Police arrest the wrong people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catch the real criminals</li> <li>• Target the hotspots, catch people who cause trouble, ban them from the area</li> </ul>
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**Schools not coping with gangs/violence**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have discussions in schools, get people in, someone they respect</li> <li>• Provide education/training outside of schools</li> </ul>
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- Report truants out of school
  - Persuade kids out of school to go back - make it worthwhile, give them a good deal
  - Develop [peer] mentoring system, youth group to go and talk to kids in Years 5 and 6 about reality of gangs, develop anti-gang programme
  - Do same for years 7 and 8 at secondary schools, see if it can be linked with a qualification
  - Re. Diplomas - if older children are reluctant to travel to other schools within the borough, there should be some kind of exchange system so that they can study in other boroughs
  - Schools to reach out, develop partnerships between students, parents and statutory agencies (CAT Recommendation)
  - Schools to develop Community Safety Plans (CAT Recommendation)

**Government Policy [is failing!]**

Poor life chances

- Involve local communities in neighbourhood renewal and addressing underlying causes - joint decision making processes (CAT Recommendation)

Deprivation: unemployment, overcrowding

- Get young people to show how careers advice, training and jobs can be provided: part-time jobs, look at NEET Strategy

Disempowerment: powerlessness

- Council and police to consider supporting similar Community safety Plans in other areas (CAT Recommendation)

A disconnect between young people and statutory agencies

- Need to develop ongoing dialogue: statutory agencies to involve young people in decision-making (CAT Recommendation)
-