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Executive Summary:

- The PROMISE project, a research project led by the University of Manchester, worked with 10 European countries to investigate young people's role in shaping society, and how they respond to challenges such as lack of opportunities, resources, and conflicts with authority. A total of **22 ethnographic case studies** were produced, along with **quantitative survey data** from young people in 10 European Countries, **Contextual reports** from each partner country and Europe, and a Cross-European **analysis of existing data sets**. This submission of evidence draws from this research, in particular the Manchester-based case study on 'risky youth'.
- Young people are **frequently stigmatised**, and have to deal with **multiple challenges** in society and in their home lives. This can include being in local authority care, excluded from school, and living in poverty. These factors have previously been linked with offending behaviour in young people.
- **The complexities and nuances that underpin young people's criminal behaviour and violence need to be understood and sufficiently addressed**, rather than relying predominantly on reactive, hostile measures that simply focus on the punitive criminal justice responses.
- The PROMISE project recognised many examples of excellent work with young people going on. It is essential that this work is developed and expanded. [PROMISE](#) research recommends a **rights-based, children-first approach** that seeks to avoid stigmatising or labelling, and instead works to restore 'foundational rights' to all young people in key areas of **education, physical and mental healthcare, interpersonal environment, and socio-economic wellbeing**.
- Investing in services and initiatives that can support this is essential; this can provide **'safe spaces' for young people** and support them in **building positive relationships with adults**, which can include those adults who were once deemed 'risky youths' themselves and are now positive role-models.
- It was evident from the PROMISE research that **investment in youth clubs, teaching support, extra-curricular activities, physical and mental health provision, and community-based policing that prioritise building trusting relationships** are critical in successfully working with those 'risky youth' who are offending or at risk of offending. It is also recognised that these are the types of services that have suffered from funding cuts due to the impact of austerity in recent years.

1. Introduction

1. The University of Manchester has been leading an international research project [PROMISE](#) funded by the European Commission, to explore young people's responses to conflict with authority figures. The evidence presented here is gathered from [one of the case studies](#), 'Risky youth', based in Manchester. The fieldwork was conducted between January 2017 and April 2018 involving participant observation at over 30 events, 21 individual interviews and 2 focus group discussions with young people seen to be 'at risk' of criminal behaviour. Most had previous convictions, some were serving sentences (Youth Rehabilitation Order or Home Detention Curfew), some had been excluded from school, and almost half had a history of being in Local Authority care.

2. The PROMISE project, and in particular the ['Risky Youth' case study](#), provide evidence about what we can do to support and include young people who are deemed as risky or troubled. By providing opportunities for inclusion for young people 'on the margins' we can strengthen young people's self-confidence, reduce their personal and social vulnerability and increase their opportunities to move forward in life. This approach gets to the heart of the causes of youth violence to provide long-term solutions.

2. Young people

How do differences in young people lives (e.g. geographic location, education, mental health, household income and socioeconomic background) make them more vulnerable to being involved in knife crime?

3. As noted in the [PROMISE project's European Policy Briefing Paper](#), urban areas have always had a great appeal for young people. However, they often present restricted spaces for young people, which can be highly problematic for young people.

4. In busy cities across Europe, it was identified that young people need safe spaces where they can develop new prospects for their future, try out identities and experience their own efficacy in a safe environment, with the support of professional youth workers where needed. Young people in rural areas also reported facing exclusion and have difficulties finding safe spaces.

3. Prevention

What could be done to make young people less likely to a) carry knives b) commit knife crime?

5. A successful strategy needs to get to the root of the problem and tackle the cause rather than the symptoms. Specific underlying factors, such as school exclusion and poverty of opportunity, are clearly linked to the rise in youth violent crime, but these underlying factors cannot be addressed unless the approach is right. [PROMISE](#) research has found that

we need to embrace a positive, rights-based, children first philosophy that doesn't stigmatise or label, but works to restore 'foundational rights' to all young people in key areas of education, physical and mental healthcare, interpersonal environment, and socio-economic wellbeing. There are some easy wins - investment in youth clubs, teaching support, extra-curricular activities, physical and mental health provision, and community-based policing with trusting relationships at its heart.

6. It is clear from the findings of the PROMISE Manchester case study, as well as case studies based in Estonia and Italy, how important it is to finance safe spaces for young people through a variety of measures, such as supporting and funding youth-led spaces, funding outreach projects and innovative approaches towards more traditional youth centres and support services, alongside encouraging participative youth work for a wide age range to cater for the diverse life paths of young people.

Are there examples of local initiatives which have worked well to prevent young people being victims or/and perpetrators of knife crime?

7. It's always difficult to know what works in terms of prevention; however, there is some clear evidence about what sorts of interventions work to include 'young people on the margins' (who may otherwise become excluded and at risk). Primarily, these are interventions that do not label or stigmatise but instead recognise that violent youth crime is a symptom of a much wider problem.

8. Positive relationships with staff (voluntary and paid) at local youth clubs and voluntary sector support groups also play a key role in preventing young people from getting involved in youth crime. As part of PROMISE, a large European research study, we've been speaking with young people across Greater Manchester about the impact of youth groups (such as youth clubs and support groups for young people leaving care) on marginalised young people's lives. They discussed the 'life saving', 'life changing' opportunities that these groups present, the solid relationships that have been formed with peers and staff, and a sense of belonging and acceptance that many had not experienced before. Sadly, as austerity hits, many of these organisations face losing their funding. The impact of their work is lessened through reductions in staff and opening hours, presenting fewer of these positive opportunities for young people.

4. Intervention

Are there any examples of how police and communities have worked together to tackle knife crime?

9. Greater Manchester Police, in line with the pro-diversionary recommendations of the Taylor review, are taking action by encouraging more amicable conversations between

officers and young people on the streets, dealing informally with minor incidents and avoiding adversarial initial contacts. These lighter-touch policing approaches are important for community cohesion and help to build up trusting relationships between otherwise marginalised young people and the police. However, alongside this, the police are still using aggressive Stop and Search – a tactic that seems to evade procedural justice, is frequently stigmatising, and disproportionately targets (and alienates) certain groups of young people. One of the PROMISE case study's, based in Manchester, heard numerous stories of conflict between the police and young people that were experienced as unjust, traumatic, disrespectful and alienating.

How effective are positive role-models in deterring young people from gang and criminal activity?

10. The PROMISE project found that there was some excellent work with young people going on in many statutory and voluntary sector organisations, particularly focusing on building positive relationships with adults. It is essential to build upon this work. There were several instances where former 'risky youth' had become role-models themselves, and were keen to 'give back' to the organisations or communities that had supported them. This was evident through volunteering and also through working in the sector. The importance of these role-models should not be understated. The research on the PROMISE case study 'risky youth' found that encouraging and developing positive relationships can help to foster trust, confidence and happiness amongst young people. These relationships with adults, including those in authority, were identified by young people as having reciprocal trust. It was clear that there were challenges involved in these relationships, sometimes arising from conflict. These challenges can see relationships with authority recast into something more positive where young people feel they have been listened to and supported with the intention of channelling conflict into constructive change and action. Opportunities must be provided for this. In the case of this research, youth clubs have been found as important sites for fostering positive relationships, and funding for such sites should be protected and increased. Recognising the nuances of the ways in which young people respond to conflict is key to fostering relationships which recast authority figures from inherently adversarial to challenging but positive.

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