

## Written evidence submitted by Nacro (BYC026)

### About Nacro

We are a national social justice charity with more than 50 years' experience of changing lives, building stronger communities and reducing crime. We house, we educate, we support, we advise, and we speak out for and with disadvantaged young people and adults. We are passionate about changing lives. We never give up.

Our response to this inquiry is informed by the views of learners in focus groups we recently ran in our Education and Skills Centres. Nacro is the largest independent not for profit training provider. Nacro provides further education and skills to around 3,000 young people and adults each year, the majority of whom have experienced severe disadvantage and interrupted education. Two out of three of our learners progress on to a positive destination in further education, training and/or employment. Nacro is rated Good by Ofsted and is a DFE and ESFA registered provider.

Our staff enable 97% of our learners to experience work placements, including students with special needs. We deliver across 15 Further Education and Skills Centres across the country including Totton College in Southampton. Nacro delivers education in the secure estate including for the NHS in forensic mental health units and is successful in getting young people out on licence to develop their skills and knowledge in the real world. Nacro works in partnership with schools to provide educational support to children aged 14 to 16 who are at risk of exclusion from mainstream education.

Please contact Andrea Coady, Policy and Research Officer, for more information on our response: [andrea.coady@nacro.org.uk](mailto:andrea.coady@nacro.org.uk). We would be delighted to support any oral evidence sessions for this inquiry.

### Our response

#### General

- 1. Are there any prominent trends in the statistics on a) who commits knife crime b) who are the victims of knife crime?**

The sentencing statistics for knife and weapon offences for the year ending March 2019<sup>1</sup> show that these types of offences being formally dealt with by the criminal justice system continues to rise (22,041 offences, an increase of 34% since the year ending March 2015). In terms of the prominent trends:

1. The number of young people (under 18) convicted or cautioned for possession of, or threats using a knife or offensive weapon has increased by almost half (48%) between March 2015 and March 2019. The increase in adult offences over the same period was smaller at 31%,

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/808496/Knife\\_and\\_Offensive\\_Weapon\\_Sentencing\\_Pub\\_Q1\\_2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/808496/Knife_and_Offensive_Weapon_Sentencing_Pub_Q1_2019.pdf)

but it is worth noting that adults account for 74% of the total increase in cautions and convictions in that period.

2. The offences tend to be concentrated in metropolitan areas. In the year ending December 2018, 33% of all crime involving a knife or sharp instrument happened in London<sup>2</sup>. However, it is important to note that knife crime is rising at a much steeper rate outside London.

These statistics suggest that there may be some need to refocus the debate, both in terms of the cohorts committing offences and in terms of geographical location. The impression given can be that it is a problem solely or largely related to young people, but most people recorded as committing knife offences are over the age of 18. There is a risk that the rhetoric around knife crime demonises young people, and does not take a broad enough view of the issue. With regard to geography, it is important to recognise that knife crime is a growing issue outside London, and so resources need to be appropriately distributed to take this into account.

All of the participants in our focus groups were clear that the amount of knife crime in their local area had significantly increased in the last few years. They were also clear that young people were more likely to carry knives and commit knife crime, but that it was not just young people that were involved: 'loads are carrying, and not just teenagers'. It was felt that it was mainly males that carry knives, but not exclusively so, and that women and girls may be asked to carry weapons on behalf of others, as they are less likely to be stopped or searched by the police. All of the focus groups voiced their concern that violent crime in general had increased, not just knife crime. It was felt that people were increasingly using other weapons, such as bottles, and this also included guns.

It was clear from discussions that many of the participants in all of the focus groups knew of at least one person in their family, friendship group or local community who had been a victim of knife crime. The victims were generally of a similar age to the participants, but some also knew of older victims.

**2. Is the Government strategy to combat knife crime doing enough to effectively: a) prevent b) intervene and; c) sentence those committing knife crime d) rehabilitate those cautioned or sentenced for knife crime?**

We note that in the year ending March 2019 37% of knife and offensive weapon offences resulted in an immediate custodial sentence compared with 22% in the year ending March 2009.<sup>3</sup> The average length of the custodial sentences received also increased over this period, from 5.5 months to 8.1 months. We would therefore question whether the increased likelihood of a custodial sentence, and the length of sentence, has had the hoped for deterrent effect, as despite increased sentences the number of offences being committed continues to rise. In our focus groups, it was clear that there was very little knowledge among those young people of what the current penalties for weapon offences actually are, with some participants having no knowledge at all. There were mixed views

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingdecember2018>

<sup>3</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/808496/Knife\\_and\\_Offensive\\_Weapon\\_Sentencing\\_Pub\\_Q1\\_2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/808496/Knife_and_Offensive_Weapon_Sentencing_Pub_Q1_2019.pdf)

about increasing sentences for knife crime with some supporting but others feeling strongly that this would not make any difference. When presented with the choice of carrying a knife/committing a crime or being stabbed themselves the participants said that the length of sentence was not a consideration.

We would argue that there should be a greater focus on the root social causes of the issue. In one of our focus groups, there was a discussion led by one participant, but supported by others in the group, who felt that the issue was 'not being dealt with properly' and that the 'government needs to do their job properly'. It was strongly felt that knife crime was linked to poverty. They said that people are poor, have no opportunities, and that people do bad things driven by the fact that they are poor. The participant leading this discussion said that the police, social services, schools are all part of the problem and do not care. They 'just go home at 5pm and don't care'. Others in the group spoke about the cost of housing, cars etc being 'sky high', and therefore unattainable for many through legitimate means. They thought that if people are poor they may sell drugs and this leads to violence and knife crime. One participant said that the government did not do anything for him and his mum, and he had to share one room with her until he was 12. This group felt that the issue of knife crime needed to be looked at differently. They felt that you solve or improve things by not concentrating on 'the problem of knife crime' but looking at wider societal issues. They felt that you cannot stop knife crime, only reduce it.

**3. Does the Government's Serious Violence Strategy strike the right balance between preventative and punitive action?**

Please see our answer to question 2 above.

**4. Is treating knife crime as a public health issue an effective approach?**

Nacro supports a public health approach to tackling serious violence which seeks to address its root causes and welcome the government's acknowledgement of the need to shift focus from a punitive response towards a multi-agency, more preventative approach. We welcome the intention to encourage organisations to share information, data and intelligence, and work in partnership rather than in isolation to identify children at risk as early as possible. However, a vision for tackling serious violence which is limited to the scope of the Serious Violence Strategy does not represent a holistic approach to protecting children from harm, which can consider the full range of partners and interventions needed, as well as the structural, political and economic factors that contribute. A broader strategy is needed which equips the safeguarding system, statutory and voluntary services to protect children from harm outside the home, with resources and guidance to do so. This should embed a response that takes account of the context in which children are at risk and is trauma-informed.

**6. Is judicial sentencing effective in a) serving as a deterrent and b) preventing reoffending?**

As stated below, many of the participants in our focus groups felt that the level of punishment was not a deterrent as people were more worried about protecting themselves: 'eat or be eaten'. At one focus group, they said they thought that it is only when people are arrested that they then think of the consequences of what they have done, and they therefore felt that the threat of punishment did not act as a deterrent.

The most recent Ministry of Justice statistics<sup>4</sup> show that there has been an increase in the number of people committing multiple offences, with the proportion of people with a previous knife or offensive weapon offence now standing at 28%, a rise of 8% since 2009. This suggests that judicial sentencing is increasingly ineffective at preventing reoffending, which suggests that a different approach, addressing the root causes, should be adopted.

## Young people

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

As stated above, in one focus group, it was strongly felt that knife crime was linked to poverty. People are poor and lack opportunity. This group felt that the issue of knife crime needed to be looked at differently. They felt that you solve or improve things by not concentrating on 'the problem of knife crime' but looking at wider societal issues.

There is growing evidence that there is a link between school exclusion and knife crime. Children excluded from school are often amongst the most vulnerable, and research commissioned by the Home Office found that children in pupil referral units were being targeted by drug gangs.

A number of participants felt that the focus of news reporting and debate around knife crime was very London-biased, when they could see a growing issue in their local area.

### **8. What motivates young people to carry knives?**

The views as to why young people were carrying knives varied to some extent from Centre to Centre:

- 'They think they're the big man': One group felt that the primary motive was to gain status among friends and rivals.
- They also felt that it was related to gangs, and that in recent years there had been a migration of gang members from London.
- County lines drug trafficking was also said to be a cause in two of the groups, but views on this were more mixed elsewhere.
- Rivalry between postcode areas was no longer seen to be a motivating factor in one group, but this was still thought to be a significant factor in other locations.
- 'Eat or be eaten': All of the focus groups said that fear was a motivating factor, but to different extents. Fear was the first response to the question as to why people were carrying knives from one group.

### **9. Is fear a motivator for young people who carry knives? What causes this? What can be done to address it?**

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As stated above, fear was a motivating factor for all of our focus groups, but to different extents. They felt that if people were carrying knives out of fear then the risks of being caught with a knife by the police, or the threat of harsher punishments would not work to discourage them from carrying knives.

‘If the police don’t protect you then you have to protect yourself’: at one group we discussed the role that the police could play in reducing fear among young people. Their perception was that the police can be heavy-handed with young people (for example showing up when they were just being a bit loud) and had negative and stereotyped views, but were then slow to react when there was a serious threat of violence against young people. We talked about when the learners might call the police if they were the victim of crime or threatened with violence, but they could not see any situation when they would do so. At another group, the participants all seemed to be in agreement that the police were not interested when a young person was stabbed, and would take more of an interest if an older person was stabbed, because if a young person was stabbed they would assume that the victim was not entirely blameless. None of the focus groups said they would ever report an incident to the police: ‘snitches get stitches’.

Some thought that if people felt under threat they would be likely to carry a knife in order to protect themselves. They felt that they would rather ‘do time’ than be injured or killed. Only one of the male participants in one group said he would not carry a knife if he were under threat, and he was clear that he knew the risks involved of carrying a knife and would not be willing to take those risks.

It is of concern to Nacro that we were told that young people may feel the need to carry knives to protect themselves as they would not call upon the police for support. We would therefore suggest that there is a great deal of work to be done around building relationships between the police and their local communities, in particular taking careful account of the needs of young people. As stated below, we are concerned that increased use of stop and search has the potential to create further tension between the police and the most vulnerable people that they serve. At Nacro, we proactively engage with local police and other agencies, and believe that we have a continuing role to play within Nacro Education Centres in facilitating dialogues and the building of relationships between our learners and the local police.

#### **10. Is there any evidence that gang culture, social media and/or music impact young people’s involvement in knife crime?**

One group talked about Grand Theft Auto and how in that game you can stab people or hit them with baseball bats. They were unsure as to whether this would make some people more likely to stab someone themselves, and did not think it made them act differently. We also talked about drill rappers and their lyrics. Some thought they sang about criminal things that they had already done, but some that this was ‘all talk’. They said this sort of stuff would not make them act differently but thought it could influence others to copy the behaviour. Some thought it was a good idea that drill rappers were being banned from YouTube, both because it removed the content but also because it made drill rappers clean up their act and behave more responsibly in order to be able to continue to promote themselves.

‘It’s not America’: one group discussed how celebrities use social media to promote themselves, and post images of themselves with knives or guns. Some said these celebrities were American and

young people did not copy that behaviour as our society was totally different, whereas others felt that young people in this country follow and try to emulate the culture that they see in America.

One participant said that there is a lot in the news about knife crime now. He said that 'white people are getting hurt and so it is seen as more relevant' and that is why it is in the news. He said people were not as interested when it was 'just' people from a BAME background. He said that news reporting 'advertises' knife crime and so it is part of the reason why people are more likely to carry knives. A participant in a different group described press reporting on the issue as 'propaganda'.

All of the groups that we spoke to are based outside London. They feel that the media was London-biased and that London news is broadcast across the country, whereas what is going on in places outside London, does not get mentioned. This meant that people from all over the country would think that knife crime was a problem in all areas because the news was so London-focused, and also meant that other areas of the country where it was happening were being ignored.

We note that the current evidence of a link between media violence and crime is weak<sup>5</sup>, but it is important to note that the way people access violence in the media is constantly changing and so we would welcome ongoing evaluation of the potential link.

#### **11. Is there a correlation between young people being excluded, or not getting enough support from, education and involvement in knife crime?**

We did not discuss this in detail within the focus groups. Some participants felt that the people involved in knife crime (and other crime) were not going to school, and so they seemed to draw a link between not being in school and being involved in criminal behaviour. We believe there is growing evidence that there is a link between school exclusion and knife crime, and research commissioned by the Home Office found that children in pupil referral units were being targeted by drug gangs. Children excluded from school are often amongst the most vulnerable, and this can be exacerbated when they are excluded as they miss out on the available support and advice available within schools, lose the structure of attending school and can become detached from their support networks.<sup>6</sup>

## **Prevention**

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

We discussed what could be done to reduce the number of people carrying knives or committing knife crime in all of the focus groups. There was little optimism in any of the groups that much could be done to improve the current situation. One participant said that once one person carries a knife it escalates from there, as more and more people will then carry a knife in response. Once this has happened she thought it was impossible to de-escalate and stop people from carrying knives, as they know that others are still carrying. Another participant said 'it's not like we're going extinct, so it's just going to happen'.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/publications/abstract.aspx?ID=242644>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2019/03/27/excluded-teens-are-often-the-most-vulnerable-and-theyre-falling-through-the-gap/>

One participant said that action had not been taken early enough to tackle the issue. He felt that the government and police should act when they see smaller trends in terms of the increase in weapons offences to deal with issues before they escalate, but they react when it is already too late: 'knife crime has now rocketed so why didn't people take action when they saw a slight increase'.

We discussed whether the following things are likely to stop people from carrying knives:

a. Increasing stop and search

Views were very mixed on this. Some thought the police should stop and search everyone, and thought the current operation of stop and search meant that it was used in a discriminatory fashion, based on stereotypes. Others thought that stop and search caused antagonism between those being searched and the police, and that stop and search would not stop people from carrying knives. Some saw no positive benefit from stop and search. They felt that if your face was known to the police then you would be more likely to be stopped and they believed that stops were being done without good reason.

In view of the fact that increased use of stop and search does not lead to a drop in violent crime,<sup>7</sup> Nacro remains concerned that increased use by the police of the power to stop and search will exacerbate racial discrimination within the criminal justice system, and result in further damage to public confidence in the police, particularly amongst young people.

b. Increased police presence

In one group the participants felt that the police were present on the streets in their local area, so they did not think the answer was more police on the streets, but they felt they needed to respond faster to issues. They did not see any value in police community support officers who were described as 'plastic police'.

It is clear that improving relationships between police and young people in some areas would be of benefit.

c. Harsher sentences

Most participants knew very little about what the penalties were for weapon offences, although one participant was clear that if the police caught someone with a knife they would simply take it off them and not take it any further (not even a caution).

Some felt that harsher sentences would deter people from carrying and using knives, whereas others did not. One participant said that longer prison sentences would not act as a deterrent when 'the choice is between jail and death'. He also said that if someone is sent to prison for longer they may become a more hardened criminal as after 10 years inside you cannot get a job, and become institutionalised.

Some thought that it is only once someone is arrested that they think about the consequences, and so did not think that harsher sentences would act as a deterrent.

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<https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/Does%20stop%20and%20search%20reduce%20crime.pdf>

The evidence from our focus group discussions suggests that harsher sentences would not act as a deterrent, as there was a lack of knowledge as to sentence levels, people do not think through the consequences until it is too late, and the threat of harsh sentences is unlikely to deter those that carry knives out of fear. There is a substantial risk that harsher sentences will disproportionately impact on the most vulnerable in our society who carry weapons out of fear. It is also important to recognise that short custodial sentences of 12 months or less have higher reconviction rates than similar offenders serving a community sentence.<sup>8</sup> Overcrowded prisons and stretched prison and probation resources are just some of the factors that have left the current quality of supervision inadequate to support people to stop reoffending and move forward with their lives.

d. Young people changing their patterns of behaviour

Some of the participants in the focus groups said that the increase in knife and other violent crime has not changed their behaviour. They said they will not be scared into acting differently, but did think that others might start carrying knives because they were scared. One participant spoke about how it made him feel uncomfortable when incidents happened in his area, but he said it would not make him stay at home. However, others reported avoiding certain areas because of the growth in knife crime. They felt that people carrying knives was becoming 'the norm', and one participant talked about how her mum now got a taxi home from her job as a support worked when she was working late at night because of concerns.

e. Sale of knives

There were differences across the focus groups as to where they thought people were getting knives from. One group immediately said 'from home' but others said people get them from shops or online. All groups said it was easy to buy knives. They knew that legally you have to be 18 to buy a knife, but many shopkeepers do not worry about checking ID if someone 'looks old enough'. They thought that it should be made more difficult to buy knives, and the law should be harder on shopkeepers as it is so easy to buy them.

One participant suggested that knives should not be sold that had a pointed tip, but others felt that this would have no impact because there were so many knives already available, the sides of the blade would still be dangerous, and people would always use other things as a weapon.

f. Parenting

It was interesting that in all of the focus groups it was clear that our learners felt that parents had a role to play in keeping their children safe. This included having open discussions and setting boundaries.

One participant described the importance of the role of his mother and her talking to him about his actions and how this impacted on his behaviour. He said he had been behaving badly and that his mother sat him down and told him that he needed to change. He said that children need to listen to their parents as they are the ones that know best. He said he wanted to do well in life so that he could pay back his mum for everything she has done for him.

g. Knife bins/knife amnesties

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



Some thought these were of limited value because knives were so easy to get hold of that people could just get another knife. One group discussed a scheme in London run by a father<sup>9</sup> who swapped knives for JD Sports vouchers and thought this was a really good idea that might be successful. They said the man doing this could talk to the young people about his personal experiences, and they thought this could be very powerful for young people.

#### h. Education

Some thought that education in schools, showing the impact on friends and family of knife crime, was really important. Others thought that those involved in knife crime would be unaffected by this, and that those involved in knife crime were not going to school. Some thought that just 'general education about knife crime' would not work as it would only reach those who would not do it anyway. Some believed that listening to lived experience of knife crime from family members would not work, and were of the view that showing shocking pictures of knife wounds (particularly zombie knife wounds) would be the only thing that might work. They said 'Guts hanging out' images would have impact.

One participant spoke about the courage that someone had to have to carry a knife, use a knife and then get away from the scene. He asked whether we thought that someone with so much courage would be persuaded by being told not to carry knives, and was clear that they would not listen.

We talked about what age people should be talked to about knife crime and it was agreed that it should be from around the age of 14.

One group felt that having focus groups like the one we were running was a really good idea as it made them think about things, and they really appreciated having the opportunity to discuss their views rather than just being lectured to about what they should and should not do. They thought that groups talking about things like knife crime or other issues such as drugs would be really helpful.

Nacro provides education by a variety of methods on issues around knife crime, including lived experience, factual teaching, courses and group discussion. The education that we deliver is learner-lead and takes into account local issues. Our overarching approach in all areas relating to safeguarding is to promote a multi-agency and joint approach. All Nacro Education Centres have regular engagement with the local police, which includes local knife crime officers, and involves both learners and staff. Nacro Education Centres have been involved in local initiatives, such as local knife amnesty weeks as part of knife crime awareness week, and we supplement such initiatives with additional material and information for our learners. Session plans and course materials on the issue of knife crime are created locally, in order to ensure that they deal with the issues that are relevant to their learners. Examples of these can be provided if it will be of assistance. We use feedback from our learners to further inform our practice, and encourage our learner voice and lived experience to form an integral part of what we deliver.

We take a trauma-informed approach when dealing with safeguarding issues. Knife crime and other safeguarding issues are embedded within all lessons, and an important part of the induction for all learners is keeping yourself safe. Safeguarding is locally driven, taking account of the issues which arise in the Nacro Centres' local areas.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://metro.co.uk/2019/03/10/father-31-encourages-teens-swap-knives-jd-sports-vouchers-8880014/>

i. Increased security and searches at schools

In one centre they did not think searches in schools were needed. They said no-one carries a knife to the Education Centre, as if they did it would soon be found (they thought others would 'snitch' in the Education Centres and so searches were not necessary). They also said that part of the reason why no-one carries a knife in the Nacro Education Centre could be that the learners feel safe. They did think that airport security might be necessary in schools which were in knife crime hotspots. Some thought that increased school security would mean that the problem would simply be pushed outside the school gates.

In a second group, they were against security around schools such as knife arches saying 'it is not America', and that schools should be building trust and teaching children from a young age what was acceptable rather than policing them in such a heavy handed way which would create a breakdown in trust. In contrast, another group felt that searches at the Education Centre, if done to everyone and not in a discriminatory way, could make everyone feel safe. They did, however, think that people could devise ways to avoid any security measures.

j. Things for young people to do

We know from our experience of working with young people, that having access to a range of activities of interest to young people can play a significant role in providing a positive focus, with some structure and the opportunity for interaction with positive role models. Some participants told us that the traditional image of 'youth clubs' would be off-putting, but there was wide support for a range of activities including boxing clubs and others sports activities. One person mentioned a bike scheme as being a good idea.<sup>10</sup>

k. Poverty

One group had a clear view that poverty was a significant cause of crime, including knife crime. A lack of legitimate opportunities together with drugs providing an avenue to quick money was an issue, and this lifestyle can be addictive. They believe knife crime is a problem that cannot be solved by itself, and that action to improve the issue needs to focus around poverty and lack of opportunity rather than focusing just on knife crime. They also made the point that 'normal' crime is linked to poverty and there is no need to make a distinction between normal crime and knife crime. They felt it is important to look beyond the crime, to look at the person's whole history and what may have lead them to behave in the way that they did.

l. First aid training

The participants thought that training in first aid and what to do if someone was stabbed would be helpful (and they thought 'bleed kits' were a good idea).

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

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-45157728>

One example which was highlighted as effective from the focus groups were the visits they have had from Alison Cope, who is the mother of Joshua Ribera who was murdered in 2013. She has shared her son's story to educate young people about the real consequences of youth violence.<sup>11</sup> The young people who had experienced it felt that this had a significant impact, and made them really think about the consequences of knife crime for all involved. It made it 'real' in a way that press reporting of stabbings or murders did not.

**15. Are there particular groups of young people who are overlooked by current prevention strategies?**

Some felt that some young women also carried knives, but not as commonly as men. They felt that young women were more likely to carry weapons to protect themselves from assault, particularly sexual assault, and that they might be more likely to carry pepper spray. They also carried personal alarms, although they doubted that anyone would come to their assistance. They said that women also worried more about acid attacks, and that this was more likely amongst older people.

At one of the focus groups, the knife crime discussion lead into a discussion about the care system, as a number of our learners in this group were currently in care. Lots of participants felt very let down by the care system, and this linked to the wider debate about tackling the causes of deprivation rather than simply trying to deal with knife crime as a discrete issue. We had a long discussion about the issues that learners had in being in care in which they repeatedly highlighted a lack of support and continuity. One learner had had 6 social workers in 2 years, and one had had 9 social workers in 2 years. They spoke about being repeatedly moved from placement to placement (being moved from town to town) and that their social workers were often uncontactable by phone. They also spoke about feeling abandoned when they turned 18, being left in a flat with everything to deal with and nothing in the way of meaningful support. There was a clear feeling in the discussion that tackling issues around deprivation, the care system, and ensuring young people had support and opportunities should be a priority.

At Nacro we have experience of reaching and working with people often disengaged from mainstream services. We know that this group can get overlooked because of the very nature of their disengagement and the fact that more mainstream services are not always able to engage them. The government should consider how best to reach those young people as they are often amongst the most vulnerable.

## **Intervention**

**16. Are there any examples of intervention schemes that have successfully rehabilitated young people who have been cautioned, reprimanded or sentenced due to knife crime, back into the community, education and/or employment?**

Although not specifically for knife crime, Nacro is currently developing a toolkit for practitioners working with young people who have committed offences to focus on developing their identity. Evidence from our 6 year Big Lottery funded Beyond Youth Custody (BYC) programme<sup>12</sup> showed that focusing on a shift in identity away from pro-offending to pro-social was crucial in successful

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<sup>11</sup> <http://alisoncope.com/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.beyondyouthcustody.net/>

resettlement for young people leaving custody. We are currently working on a project, funded by Barrow Cadbury, to look at how this can effectively be used with young people at an earlier stage.

The BYC framework provided a new focus for resettlement services' aims and objectives, and is particularly useful as a common language for the inter-agency working that is essential when supporting children and young people in the youth justice system. It proposes a theory of change for the effective resettlement of young people leaving custody. It recognises that effective and sustainable resettlement facilitates a shift in the way that a young person sees themselves, from an identity that promotes offending to one that promotes a positive contribution to society. The framework highlights how services should guide the young person with structural and personal support. This will assist in their development of a positive identity and become a new narrative for how they relate to others. Within the framework, young people are recognised as the central agent in their own rehabilitation.

Effectiveness of support is not just dependent on what steps providers take at different stages of the sentence, but how they take them. The research identified five key characteristics of all resettlement support that research has consistently shown are crucial to effectiveness and sustainability (the 5 Cs): Constructive, Co-created, Customised, Consistent and Co-ordinated.

Although the focus of the BYC project was on what works in terms of effective resettlement for young people leaving custody, we believe that the learning from that research can be applied across the criminal justice system.

### **17. What examples are there for whole community approaches to intervention?**

At one group, two participants were from the traveller community. They said that people in their communities do not carry weapons. If there is an issue it is sorted out with fists and that is then an end to it. One was clear that if he carried or used a knife he would be rejected by his community.

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

Some participants felt that youth workers and youth facilities for young people could be an important avenue for young people to have contact with positive role models. In one group, the participants said that these services for young people no longer existed. Some felt that younger children are asked to commit the crime (such as selling drugs) in return for payment. They felt that this was particularly the case for vulnerable children who were isolated or had no positive role models, who are then targeted with promises of love and friendship. The 'elders' in gangs protect themselves from getting arrested by getting the 'youngsters' to do their dirty work. They felt that lots of people carry knives to protect themselves when they are carrying or dealing drugs.

### **20. Are the police's stop and search powers effective in promoting safety and/or putting young people off carrying knives?**

Please see the comments above with regard to the views of the participants on stop and search powers (Q12.a).