

SEEN AND HEARD

YOUNG PEOPLE, POLICING
AND CRIME: AN MPA REPORT

I FEEL THEY STEREOTYPE
US YOUTHS BECAUSE OF THE
WAY WE DRESS AND LOOK.

THE POLICE SHOULD BE MORE
HELPFUL TOWARDS YOUNG
PEOPLE AND SHOW THEM THEY
ARE THERE TO HELP... AND
ARE NOT THEIR ENEMIES.

IF YOU TELL THE POLICE
SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED TO
YOU, THEY WILL LAUGH AT YOU
OR THEY WON'T REALLY CARE.

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE AN
ENORMOUSLY IMPORTANT PART
OF LONDON AND AN ASSET...
THE MET'S VIEW IS THAT YOUNG
PEOPLE ARE NOT THE PROBLEM;
THEY ARE THE SOLUTION.

COMMISSIONER SIR IAN BLAIR,
METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE



WELCOME

Much has been said about youth crime and the fear it causes amongst adults, but the fact remains: **the vast majority of young people are not criminals**. This year the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) decided to get the big picture on young people and crime and to hear from young Londoners themselves – be they victims, witnesses, those involved in crime or young people just wanting to have a say about youth crime. We also wanted to hear what young people think about the police, and what they feel the police and other organisations should do to tackle youth crime.

The big picture

The main issues we wanted to look at were:

- **how can police and other organisations work together to give better support to young victims and witnesses?**
- **how can police and others – including youth workers, local authorities, and the justice system – work together to reduce youth offending?**
- **what drives some young people into crime?**
- **how can we help young people have a say in policing?**

To find answers we recruited 26 young Londoners to help us with planning our work. In total we spoke to about 1,000 young people and adults who work with young people. They took part in interviews, panel discussions, informal meetings and online surveys. The conversations with young people were challenging, revealing, and sometimes uncomfortable. This booklet summarises what we learned, and based on what we heard, suggests real ways in which we can make London a safer place for young people and adults.

TALK TO YOUNG PEOPLE,
FOR GOSH SAKE! THEY
ARE HUMAN!



WE HAVE GOT TO ASK
QUESTIONS TO UNDERSTAND
THE LAW AND THE POLICE
FORCE, AND GOT TO GIVE
OUR OPINIONS TO IMPROVE
YOUTH INTERACTION WITH
THE POLICE.

YOUNG PERSON



YOUNG PEOPLE AS CITIZENS

Drop the stereotype

Young people say that public perception of them is often stereotyped. However, our work shows that given the right opportunities, young people want to be involved in projects that support their local community or their city – whether this is peer group work to improve behaviour on transport; supporting young people in reporting crime or taking part in the UK Youth Parliament.

The responsibility for changing adult perceptions must not lie with young people. **Adults must recognise the value of including young people in decisions about the services that affect their lives because:**

- solutions to problems will be relevant to young people if they have been involved in developing them;
- if young people are involved in making decisions, it indicates to them that they are highly valued members of their communities;
- when young people are asked for their opinions and decisions it makes them feel that they are important and valued.

FACT BOX

Youth offences have not risen in the past six years, showing that the level of youth crime is much lower than the public believe it to be. In 2006-07, only 6% of London's 10 to 19-year-olds were accused of a crime.

LISTEN TO YOUNG PEOPLE INSTEAD OF JUST ACCUSING THEM, GET THEM INVOLVED RATHER THAN STANDING BACK... SOMETIMES IT SEEMS LIKE THEY ARE (ADULTS) SCARED OF YOUNG PEOPLE.



YOUNG PEOPLE AS VICTIMS AND WITNESSES

Fear of crime

Young Londoners are like adult Londoners - they are afraid of crime and fear for their safety. Young people say their safety depends on where they are, and how familiar they are with the neighbourhood. Some young people refer to their neighbourhoods as 'endz'. They say they are safe in their own 'endz', but not in others.

Adults explained that 'endz' is a result of some young people – mainly from poor backgrounds and those without supportive families – creating their own alternative cultures. This leads to a higher-than-normal value being placed on a young person's immediate neighbourhood. This is worrying, because it prevents some young people from travelling around London freely and stops them taking part in activities in other parts of London.

Young people don't report crime

Young people accept behaviour that adults won't – for instance they feel they only need to report serious crimes, not minor ones such as the theft of a mobile or an ipod.

The 'no snitch' culture is widespread. Young people feel that if they snitch the police can't guarantee their safety, leaving victims, their friends and family open to revenge attacks. This means a large amount of youth crime goes unreported, including serious crimes such as robberies, assaults and stabbings.

Young people choose not to report crimes to the police and other agencies, because:

- of a lack of awareness of what is actually considered a crime;
- of pride – young people would rather deal with incidents themselves than involve police;
- young people find police stations unwelcoming and unfriendly places.

Getting young people to report crime

It's important to get young people to report crime. The police and other agencies need to consider new ways of allowing young people to report crime. Young people say they would definitely be more willing to report crimes if they thought something positive would happen as a result.

Encouraging young people to report crimes could help to break the link between being a victim and getting involved in crime. Young people who are regularly victimised may become offenders, and young people who offend can be victimised by other offenders. Reporting breaks this cycle. It can be encouraged in two ways:

- **stressing to young people the effects of not reporting. This can be reinforced by, for example, asking families of victims to speak about the impact of the crime on them and how reporting the crime helped the family;**
- **providing appropriate support for young people when they report a crime. If young victims or witnesses think their needs will be met positively, they will be more likely to report crimes.**

Forced into crime

Some young people are forced into offending by other young people or adults. Young people say that the police should arrest those adults and young people who force young people to take part in crime, rather than those young people who have been forced into it.

Certain issues leave some young people vulnerable to being forced into crime. These are often called 'risk factors'. These factors can include child abuse and neglect, or living in a high-crime area where gang culture or crime is hard to avoid. It is the responsibility of those working with young offenders to take these risk factors into account when considering what support to give young people.

I AM NOT SAYING THAT
EITHER POLICE OR YOUNG
PEOPLE ARE BLAMELESS,
BUT IT COMES DOWN TO A
LACK OF UNDERSTANDING
OR MUTUAL RESPECT.

YOUNG PERSON



FACT BOX

Young people are most likely to be victimised or commit a crime between 3-5pm, or late at night. One of the most common locations for youth crime and youth offending is outside school or on buses as schoolchildren travel home across areas they don't feel they belong in.

IF YOU ARE NOT LISTENED
TO AT HOME, GANGS CAN
LOOK AFTER YOU.

YOUNG PERSON



EVERYONE MEETS UP
AND DOES MADNESS WITH
EACH OTHER. IN MY MIND I
NEVER THOUGHT IT WAS A
GANG, JUST FRIENDS.

YOUNG PERSON



YOUNG PEOPLE WHO COMMIT CRIME

Why some young people get into crime

It's no surprise that the areas in London with high levels of youth crime are also those which have high levels of other types of crime and are poorer and more deprived.

There are many reasons why some young people get involved in crime. Young people gave us the following reasons:

- **recognition and respect: some young people gain a reputation by offending. Others believe that violence is an acceptable way to deal with perceived or actual wrongs;**
- **being forced into crime by adults or other young people;**
- **revenge: striking back at people who have done things to them;**
- **territorial conflict;**
- **lack of strong criminal justice penalties: some young people feel the sentences given for youth crime are too soft to prevent them offending;**
- **need and greed: some young people believe that there are few legitimate ways for them to make money and therefore taking part in crime is another option;**
- **boredom: young people have few interesting activities to take part in; those that exist are often expensive, poorly planned or difficult to get to.**

Weapons: a false sense of security

Some young people carry knives and weapons for self-defence, and to give themselves a sense of security. But they also know that carrying a knife can create situations which could have a violent ending – If the other young person shows a weapon, they need to be prepared to use their own.

FACT BOX

The amount of serious crime committed by young people has increased. Young people are more likely to be victims of violent crime than adults.

Young people and gangs

Adults connect the word 'gangs' with criminal behaviour, but for some young people, the word 'gang' is a positive word and can mean identity, territory, culture, belonging, protection and respect.

The police and other organisations need to find a sensible response to gangs and they can do this by better understanding gang activity in London. There has to be an agreed understanding across London of what the term 'gang' actually means. We need to make sure that when the police and other agencies working in youth offending use the word 'gang' they are using it to describe criminal behaviour and are not using it to describe how young people socialise with each other.

Failure of criminal justice deterrents

Surprisingly perhaps, many young people believe that the criminal justice penalties for offending are too soft. They are critical of custodial sentences (sentences which result in young people being sent to young offenders institutes), believe that prisons and young offenders institutes should be harsher, that life sentences should mean life, and that sentencing should be stricter.

Finding solutions

Young people and adults that spoke to the MPA gave us a number of solutions to tackle youth crime. They suggest:

- **stepping in when young people first get involved in crime is essential;**
- **an increase of affordable youth activities will divert young people in danger of getting into crime;**
- **it is important to take into account young people's wider community contacts. They said that parents, families, teachers and religious leaders should be spoken to when decisions are made about how to support a young person who is involved in youth crime.**

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE POLICE

The contact that young people have with individual police officers – as victims, witnesses, offenders, or simply as Londoners – affects how they feel about the police service as a whole. It also affects whether they are confident that the police will support and respond to their needs. The main issue spoken about by many young people was the quality of the contact they had with officers.

Direct contact with the police

Good quality contact tends to occur between young people and officers who have been based in one area for a significant amount of time. For example, many young people are positive about Safer Neighbourhoods Officers and Safer Schools Officers. These officers are building positive relationships with young people through their day to day encounters with them.

FACT BOX

Beatbullying highlighted in their Bullying and Truancy Report 2006 that approximately 170,000 children truant every day because of bullying. Therefore the MPA feel that the work of Safer Schools Officers is important.

Youth projects involving police officers are another good way of improving contact between the police and young people. This can tackle the negative stereotypes young people have of the police and the negative stereotypes that the police have of young people.

Quite often young people respond to police officers in a way that is unrelated to the actual incident. Young people can be defensive when they meet officers and are unable to see the individual behind the uniform. Young people also believe that the police deliberately go out of their way to target them.

FACT BOX

40% of young people that took part in an MPA youth survey said that they were not confident the police would be able to respond to their needs as young people.

Age and race

Some young people feel that the police challenge or confront them simply because they are young people. As well as the age issue, some Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) young people stated that some police officers behaved in a racist manner.

However, others thought that young people need to take personal responsibility for their own behaviour and how they interact with police.

We learnt that Londoners might not be aware that the police are trying to be more representative of different races and cultures. We were told by police officers that many new police officers are Londoners, and that more BME Londoners are joining the police service. However, young people often do not notice these changes, maybe because young people don't see the police as part of their communities.

Stop and search

Stop and search is an important issue for young people. We learnt that though some young people understand why stop and search is important in tackling crime, many are unhappy with how the police use it. We learned that by providing young people with clear information on stop and search, the resentment that young people have towards this practice could be tackled.

But this is not enough. Officers need to consider the way they speak to young people when carrying out a stop and search. They should be able to calm down even the most difficult situations if they respond with courtesy.

Peer pressure: how young people's views influence other young people

There was a great deal of debate between young people about whether the police were good at interacting with young people. Quite often young people who spoke positively about the police were shouted at and put down by other young people.

The tribalism of young people can have a negative influence on their views of each other. A young person who stays in his or her own area ('endz') and whose friendships are with people from their 'endz' is unlikely to accept other viewpoints. The 'endz' issue can also encourage young people to have negative perceptions of each other.

THERE IS NO POINT IN
SAYING THAT THE POLICE
ARE RUBBISH, WE NEED TO
DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

YOUNG PERSON



OTHER AGENCIES AND CRIME PREVENTION

Adults told us that crime prevention is not just the responsibility of the police and that other organisations need to support the police more effectively.

What is needed?

Adults told us that while the police need to enforce the law they also need to be trusted and valued part of communities, and they can do this by speaking to and getting to know the communities in which they were based. They can also do this by building positive relationships with young people.

Agencies failing to respond

Adults feel that the police responses to youth crime are often more effective than responses to youth crime by other agencies. They also told us that the police are often limited by what they can do because other agencies are not supporting young people at risk of becoming involved in crime.

For example, some adults feel that a few Children's Services are not supporting young people at risk, and that these young people are becoming involved in crime and anti-social behaviour. Some adults even believe there is a link between the lack of a support a young at-risk person receives and youth crime.

Lack of provision of youth facilities

Adults and young people feel that there has been a reduction in youth facilities and activities. There are fewer cinemas, bowling alleys, discos, snooker halls and youth clubs, which can mean that young people have to travel further to take part in expensive activities they can't really afford. While there are special activities aimed at particular groups of young people (for example projects for teenage parents), most young people feel there is nothing for them to do, and this, they believe, can lead to youth offending.

For youth activities to meet the needs of young people, we need:

- to look at current youth facilities and activities and work out what works well, and why it works well;
- to identify what projects are still needed;
- to include young people when making decisions about new youth facilities and activities.

THERE IS NO MONEY FOR US TO GO TO YOUTH CLUBS... THINGS ARE TOO EXPENSIVE AND THAT IS THE REASON WHY YOUNG PEOPLE ROB EACH OTHER.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE MEDIA

Press portrayal of young people is often negative and can influence young people's behaviour.

The media rarely highlights young people's achievements and this can damage adult perceptions of young people.

The impact of negative coverage on adults

Often adults have little direct contact with young people, so the portrayal of young people in the press is frequently the only view adults have of young Londoners.

The press often use negative terms for young people such as 'yob' and 'thug' and these have become popular terms used by many adults to describe all young people.

However the media can also be used to promote positive images of young people. For instance, Choice FM's 'Peace on the Streets' campaign raises awareness of the impact of being involved in gang culture and carrying weapons.

FACT BOX

A study carried out by Ipsos MORI (2004) found that 71% of youth related local and national press stories over a one-week period were negative, with only 14% being positive.

THE PORTRAYAL OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE MEDIA IS NEGATIVE. THEY ARE EITHER THUGS OR ASBO KIDS. THIS RESULTS IN SOME YOUNG PEOPLE THINKING, WELL WHAT'S THE POINT OF BEING GOOD, IF WE ARE ALL PORTRAYED AS BAD? THIS MAKES THEM ANGRY IF THEY ARE NOT LIKE THAT. BUT SOME YOUNG PEOPLE SIMPLY DON'T CARE AND LIVE UP TO IT.



WHAT WE LEARNED: A NEW WAY FORWARD

Our conversations with young people and adults, helped us identify many ways to deal positively with youth crime.

While most of our advice relates to the police, some of our suggestions are aimed at helping other organisations working with young people. We believe that it is only by working together with other agencies that the police will be able to provide lasting solutions to youth crime.

The advice is based on the full MPA findings. For a copy of the full MPA report please contact the Oversight and Review Unit. Contact details can be found on page 13.

Our advice to the police and other agencies working with young people:

1. Adults working in services and organisations that deal with children and young people's issues should **make sure they include children and young people when deciding how their services work.**
2. Safer Schools Officers and Safer Neighbourhoods Officers should interact regularly with young people. However, **all police officers should treat young people with courtesy and respect.**
3. **A visible police presence** at key times and locations for youth crime – near schools and on buses at the end of the school day, for example – is essential.
4. Police and other relevant agencies must **work together to improve the way young people report crime** and involve young people in designing reporting methods.
5. All organisations including the police **must make sure victims and witnesses needs are met.** This is important as evidence suggests that some young people who are victimised may become offenders.

6. Some young people are more likely to offend because of their personal or family circumstances. **Early support provided to these young people and their families can stop them becoming offenders at a later age.**

7. The development of new and existing youth activities in London should **include the participation of young people.**

8. Young people should be provided **with clear and simple information on police tactics** and operations taking place in their neighbourhood.

9. All agencies that provide services for young people should **strongly tackle myths about young people** and promote positive images of young people.

10. All agencies with a responsibility for the welfare of children and young people should ensure that they **work together, effectively sharing information** to protect young people from further harm or those who are at risk of getting involved in crime.

Next steps

Recommendations for the police have been given to the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to consider. In November 2008 the MPS will explain how they will take forward the recommendations. The MPA will keep an eye on progress made by the police and ensure that those Londoners – both young and old – who took part in our work are kept informed of any changes that have occurred.

There are a number of recommendations for other agencies. The MPA has contacted these agencies and asked them to consider the report and the recommendations that relate to their work. Recently the Government produced a Youth Crime Action Plan. This has similar ideas to the MPA report, which gives our recommendations added importance.



GET CONNECTED

Staying safe

If you have been a victim of crime or have been a witness to a crime and want to talk confidentially, contact Victim Support at 0845 30 30 900.

If you or someone you know is being bullied please contact ChildLine. ChildLine is a confidential service and can help you with any sort of problem you might have - big or small. Childline can be contacted on 0800 1111.

Further practical information on what to do about bullying can be found at www.beatbullying.org

For further information on how to stay safe visit www.met.police.uk/youngpeople Copies of the leaflet are available from the MPA. See contact details below.

Register your mobile phone with Immobilise at www.immobilise.com/about.html

Know your rights

To learn about your rights regarding stop and search visit www.mpa.gov.uk/issues/stop-search/leaflet.htm Copies of the 'Stop and search, know your rights' leaflet are available from the MPA.

Reporting crime

There are many ways to report crimes. In emergency situations, you must call 999.

In non emergency situation when a police officer is not immediately required (for example graffiti, abandoned vehicles and minor anti social behavior) you can call 0300 123 1212.

Some non-emergency crimes can also be reported online at <https://online.met.police.uk/>

You can also visit your local police station or you can report anonymously through Crimestoppers at www.crimestoppers-uk.org or on 0800 555 111. Details of your local police station can be found at www.met.police.uk/local/

Play your part

Given the right opportunities, many young people are keen to be involved in activities that make their communities safer and more enjoyable places to live. The MPA and MPS have a number of opportunities for young people who are interested not only in making their communities safer, but who also want to have a say and make a difference.

Have your say

Every autumn the MPA asks Londoners to tell them what issues the police should focus on. Make sure you have your issues and concerns considered – visit www.mpa.gov.uk to take part in the annual consultation.

Volunteer police cadets

If you are aged 14-19 years, joining the police cadets is a good way of getting involved with the police. It's an opportunity to learn and develop new skills. To find out more contact cadets@met.police.uk

Safer Neighbourhoods Teams

If you want to get involved in the work of your local Safer Neighbourhoods Team, visit www.met.police.uk/saferneighbourhoods/

Young Black Positive Advocates

Young Black Positive Advocates is a youth organisation run by young people, for young people. To find out how to become a member contact chair@ybpa.com

If you do not have access to a computer and are interested in taking part in any of the activities above contact the MPA at 0207 202 0161.



How to contact us

We welcome feedback
and if you have any comments
to make about this report please write to:

Oversight and Review Unit
MPA
10 Dean Farror Street
London
SW1H 0NY

You can email us at: review@mpa.gov.uk

Tel: 0207 202 0161

For an accesible version of this report
please contact the MPA at the address above.