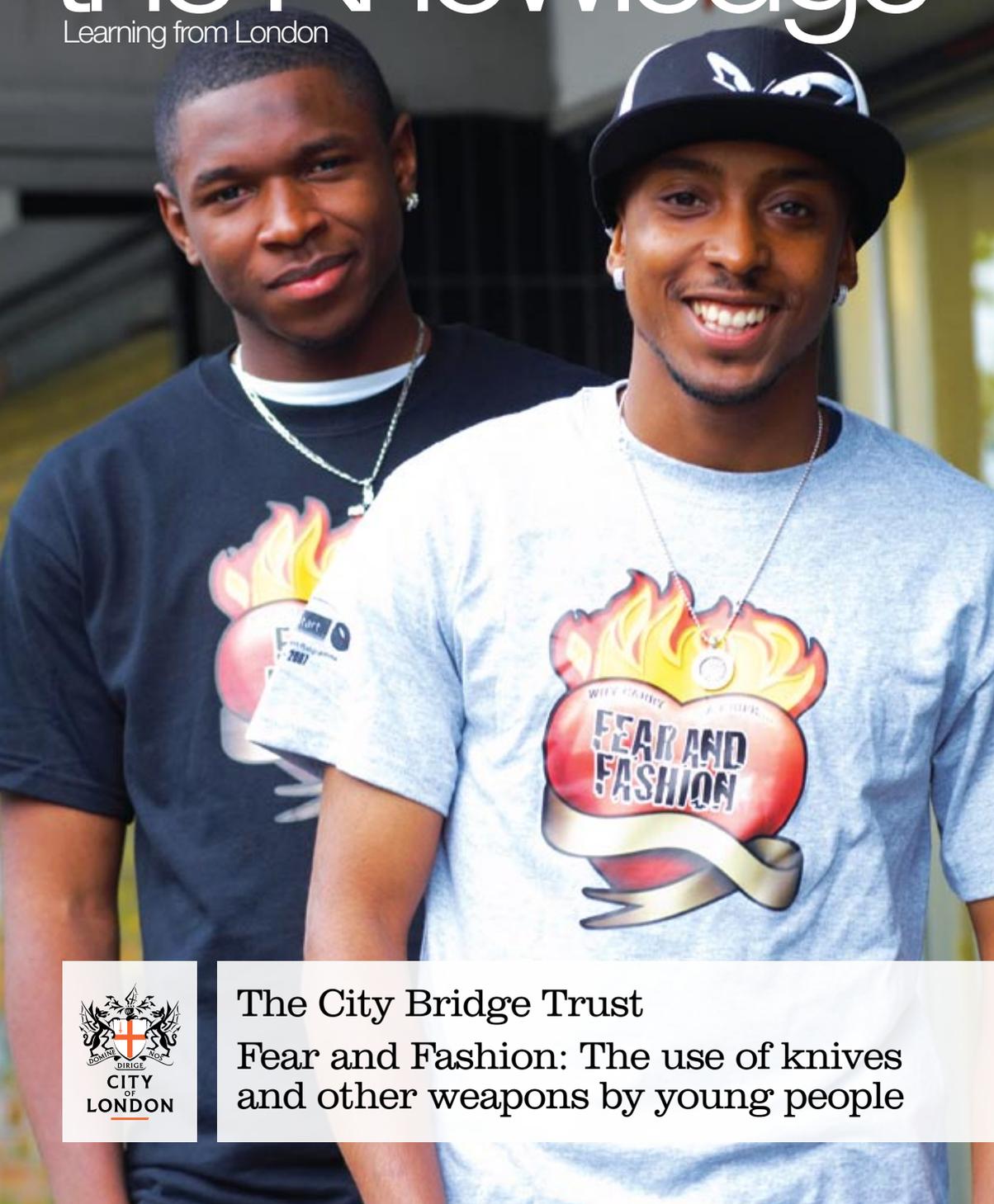


Issue 4
July 2009

the Knowledge

Learning from London



The City Bridge Trust

Fear and Fashion: The use of knives
and other weapons by young people

Background

In 2004 the City Bridge Trust published **Fear and Fashion: The use of knives and other weapons by young people** researched and written by Lemos&Crane. The report identified two overarching reasons why young people carried knives, reflected in the title, fear and fashion.

In surveys many young people reported they carried knives or other weapons because they feared bullying, harassment, intimidation or being the victim of a crime, particularly street theft. For other young people carrying a knife was the result of identification with, and membership of, a peer group in a particular neighbourhood.

In some instances the prevalence of carrying knives was connected to involvement with gangs often battling for drug dealing turf and using knives, guns and other weapons to impose their will and their control of what they perceive as their territory.

Following the publication of that report a group of funders came together to establish the Fear and Fashion initiative: The City Bridge Trust, City Parochial Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, John Lyon's Charity and Wates Foundation. They funded four demonstration projects for three years to work in areas of London in which murders by stabbing had taken place. The funders' motivation for establishing this initiative was to invest in targeted prevention work, particularly at a time when the Government had acknowledged public concern about stabbings but was not prioritising prevention and diversion of knife crime, focusing

instead on stop and search and other methods of improving detection, such as knife arches, and emphasising prosecution and increased use of custodial sentences.

The aim of the Fear and Fashion initiative was to evaluate the benefits of targeted prevention work undertaken with individuals and groups in educational and community settings, recognising the challenges and difficulties of 'measuring' the effectiveness of preventative work.

In 2007 the Fear and Fashion website (www.fearandfashion.org.uk) was launched to disseminate findings from the demonstration projects. By 2009 the website was being regularly used by more than 1,000 public and voluntary organisations for the latest research findings, Government policy and examples of good practice on dealing with carrying and using knives.

Action learning meetings have been held with the staff working on the demonstration projects to reflect on their experiences, distill the learning from them and to develop their approaches as well as to identify lessons about tackling knife crime for wider dissemination.

The nature and extent of carrying and using knives

Exact figures for the numbers of people carrying or using knives, or the numbers of people injured as a result, are difficult to establish for certain. Data about knife crime specifically has only recently been collected and it is too early to establish trends.

Whilst it is clear that the number of people being prosecuted and given custodial sentences for knife crime in London has risen (see below) and the Metropolitan Police report that knife crime in London has fallen by 10.9 per cent between March 2008 and February 2009, there is no conclusive evidence that this has reduced the number of people carrying knives overall.

However, drawing on practitioner feedback in action learning sessions and from comments on the Fear and Fashion website, some aspects of the trends in the prevalence of carrying and using knives are fairly clear:

- The vast majority of young people do not carry or much less use knives. However, knives are carried without being used by a significant minority of young people. In surveys young people report that fear of bullying, intimidation and crime are the main motives. Self-disclosed motives in surveys should be treated with caution. Claiming to carry a knife may be an act of bravado even by those who do not carry knives. Conversely, since most young people are aware that carrying a knife is a crime, though they may not believe that they are likely to get caught or punished, those who actually carry knives for whatever motive may very well deny it in surveys.
- Knives are sometimes used as threats in street robberies and muggings.
- Carrying knives is associated with some gang identities. Gangs are not just groups of young people who hang around together. They are a group with an identified leader, a name, a dress code, a defined territory and, usually, an illicit economic purpose, such as drug dealing.
- Carrying knives by some young people is seen as 'normal' behaviour within certain sub-cultures, which tend to operate in small and specific geographical areas, hence the notion of a 'fashion' in some neighbourhoods for carrying knives.
- Carrying knives can be a 'stepping stone' either to using the knives, or to carrying or using guns.
- The people who use knives are not necessarily those who carry them. Some 'gang leaders' do not carry knives; they 'call for' them on mobile phones before committing an assault or a crime.
- Knives can be used to threaten, intimidate or actually stab someone as part of territorial or 'postcode' disputes.
- Although there does seem to be a link between knife use and gang-related activity, victims of stabbings are not necessarily involved with gangs.

Fear and Fashion demonstration projects

One of the funders' principle motives in establishing the Fear and Fashion initiative was to identify and disseminate good practice in preventing carrying and using knives. Four demonstration projects were established. Their main areas of work, as identified through independent evaluation, are set out below.

Kickstart (Crime Concern)

Kickstart consists of 15 activities in the London Borough of Southwark targeted at young people aged between 8 years and 30 years. The three main areas of work are:

- Establishing and supporting a young people's forum/youth action group engaged in anti-knife activities designed and developed by the members.
- The Circle Programme, a preventative six week programme for schools, which has also been delivered as a 'taster' session in community settings.
- Expression Nights are performing arts events (rap, music, comedy, poetry etc) promoting anti-knife messages to young people.

Leap Confronting Conflict

Leap Confronting Conflict specialises in conflict resolution and mediation with young people. For their Fear and Fashion programme in North Westminster they deliver:

- Intensive group work with young people identified either as involved, or at risk of being involved, with knife crime by the project's steering group of local agencies (including the Youth Offending Team, Positive Activities for Young People, Metropolitan Police, Youth Inclusion Support Panels and Westminster Council's Education Directorate).
- Youth work placements are offered as follow-up for participants who have completed the intensive group work.
- Schools programmes have been initiated in St George's School, Paddington Academy and Westminster Academy. These programmes involve an initial 'conflict audit' followed if necessary by a development programme for peer mediators drawn from school students.

Catch 22 (formerly Rainer)

As part of the Fear and Fashion programme Catch 22 has placed a worker full-time in the Brent Youth Offending Team (YOT). The YOT refers people who have been involved with or are at risk of becoming involved in carrying or using knives. They then participate in a tailored one-to-one programme. The focus of the programme is:

- Knowledge and understanding of the law on knife crime, and
- Understanding the consequences for the young person and others of being involved in knife crime.

The placing of a specialist worker dedicated to working on knife crime within a YOT means that the Fear and Fashion project has become a valuable resource for other partner organisations working on knife crime in the area.

Uncut

The Uncut programme is run by Working with Men on behalf of the Paddington Development Trust in North Westminster and South Brent. The components of the Uncut programme are:

- Conflict management workshops;
- Mock trials programme;
- Fatal stabbing assemblies in schools; and
- One-to-one work with at risk young people.

Evaluation of the *Fear and Fashion* demonstration projects

Clear Plan has been commissioned to undertake an independent evaluation of the four demonstration projects. The interim evaluation report reached the following 'overall analysis':

- The personality, skills and approach of the staff have been identified by local partners as being an important factor in successfully undertaking this work. This theme will be developed further in the next year to identify more clearly the competencies and styles of approach which best suit this work.
- Harnessing peer influences is important in establishing credibility with young people. The fashion motive for knife carrying is a manifestation of peer influences. Young people carry knives even if they do not intend to use them for committing crime, because other young people within groups whom they identify with, particularly the leaders of the group, are also carrying knives. Combating these peer influences which encourage knife carrying requires promoting positive peer influences, encouraging new interests, groupings and lifestyles. Good company will need to replace bad company. For example, inviting young people at risk of crime or school exclusion to deejaying workshops gave them an alternative network and a different source of status amongst other young people.
- The absence of effective coordination mechanisms at local level limits the impact of projects. In some neighbourhoods where knife crime had been identified as a priority a number of statutory and voluntary groups were promoting work on knife crime. However, there was no robust information about which young people at risk, which methods were effective and which agencies should do what.

The developing social and policy context for knife crime

Since the Fear and Fashion programme was launched, the public and political debate about knife crime has drastically changed.

The level of public awareness of knife crime has exploded as a result of an extremely high media and political profile. Some of the media reporting has been unbalanced and has over-stated the extent of the problem, suggesting that knife crime is an 'epidemic' which is widespread all over the country, when in fact knife crime is highly location-specific. Government policy and the policies of the Mayor of London have altered dramatically since 2008 and become much more proactive, emphasising arrest, prosecution and custodial sentencing. The changes to criminal justice policy include:

- Increasing use of police stop and search to detect the carrying of knives.
- Increasing use of knife arches at schools to detect the carrying of knives.
- A presumption that those caught carrying knives will be charged and prosecuted, not cautioned. Crown Prosecution Service guidance to prosecutors updated in November 2008 says "there is a strong public interest in deterring the carrying and use of knives and other offensive weapons. Accordingly, where there is sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction, the public interest will normally require a prosecution."¹
- A toughening of sentencing guidelines, to emphasise the need for custodial rather than community sentences for knife crime has now been implemented. The Ministry of Justice confirmed in March 2009 that "the number of cautions given for knife or offensive weapon possession decreased while the number of immediate custodial sentences, suspended sentence orders and community sentences rose between Quarter 4 2007 and Quarter 4 2008."²

Sentencing for knife crime

	Quarter 4 2007	Quarter 4 2008
Cautions	2,455 (36%)	1,706 (25%)
Immediate custody	1,125 (17%)	1,386 (21%)
Suspended sentences	447 (7%)	728 (11%)
Community sentences	1,861 (27%)	2,151 (32%)
Total	5,888	5,971

Source: Knife Crime Sentencing Quarterly Brief October to December 2008 England and Wales, Ministry of Justice Statistics Bulletin, March 2009

The Government believes that these more proactive approaches to detection and more stringent approaches to prosecuting and sentencing will act as a deterrent and reduce the number of young people carrying knives. Although there is compelling evidence of public concern about knives, it is too early to tell whether this new 'hardline' approach will work in reducing the carrying and using of knives. Undoubtedly, however, these approaches are already leading to more offenders being prosecuted, receiving custodial sentences and acquiring a criminal record.

¹ Offensive Weapons, Knives, Bladed and Pointed Articles, Crown Prosecution Service, updated November 2008.

² Knife Crime Sentencing Quarterly Brief October to December 2008 England and Wales, Ministry of Justice, March 2009.

Lessons learnt so far from the *Fear and Fashion* initiative

The four projects funded under the Fear and Fashion initiative could never solve the problem of knife crime, or even demonstrate how to solve the problem. However a number of important lessons have already emerged. The programme seeks to establish good practice, identify contributory success factors and share the learning with others. Set out below are some of the interim lessons learnt on work to prevent the carrying and using of knives.

1. Awareness-raising with young people, including those young people most at risk of crime, of the dangers to themselves and others of using and carrying knives along with prevention work is important, especially in schools.
2. 'Shock and awe' deterrence is of limited value and can be counter-productive. Showing young people photographs of bloody wounds caused by stabbing may well shock and deter those who do not carry or use knives. However the same pictures may reinforce that, causing a serious injury through stabbing is all too easy in the minds of young people already considering committing a crime involving a knife.
3. Young people in general are interested and concerned about the extent of carrying knives and knife-enabled crime and keen to know more about it.
4. Some young people carry knives with no intention of using them and fail to recognise the danger that their own knife could be used against themselves or others.
5. Young people can be engaged in prevention initiatives through more generic community-based youth work and activities for young people, including arts-based activities such as music and deejaying, as well as work in schools.
6. However, it is harder to directly engage the young people at risk of becoming involved in knife-enabled crime. These are often young people on the fringes of gang activity and associated with young people who use knives as part of committing other crimes, such as mobile phone theft. The risk factors for knife crime seem to be similar to those for other youth crime, including poor school attendance.

The demonstration projects have developed their work in Pupil Referral Units to reach the group of young people at risk.

7. Feedback from all the projects suggests that parents in general and particularly parents in areas where there has been fatal stabbing are extremely concerned about knife crime. Parents whose children have been murdered by stabbing tend briefly to become high profile figures in the media, but there is a yawning gap in advice for parents, both those parents who are concerned that their children might be carrying or using knives and those parents whose children have been prosecuted and are now part of the Criminal Justice System. There is a risk that information available to parents is scare-mongering and misleading, giving rise to unnecessary anxiety. Some parents seek to deny their child's role in knife crime or their own responsibility for ensuring their child is safe. General advice is available on Government-sponsored websites, however more specific one-to-one advice is needed for parents to recognise, own and discuss the problem with their children before, rather than after, a tragedy occurs.
8. Many knife-related incidents blow up out of other tensions and conflicts and there is still too little capacity for mediation and conflict resolution in schools and communities to nip these tensions in the bud, before they escalate into territorial or armed conflicts.
9. One-to-one work with young offenders dealing explicitly with the carrying and using of knives and other weapons can be effective. There is a shortage of capacity within YOTs for undertaking this deterrent work.
10. In the long term the alternatives to knife crime are higher aspirations and positive peer influences to reduce and destroy the appeal of transgressive violent sub-cultures and get-rich-quick illegal ways of earning money, such as drug dealing.

Conclusion

The Fear and Fashion demonstration projects have developed a useful body of good practice on tackling knife carrying and using amongst young people which should address wide public concern and could be beneficially replicated and built upon elsewhere.

A lot of good work is coming out of the Fear and Fashion demonstration projects. It is, however, too early to detect overall reductions in knife crime in the areas where they are working or reduced re-offending by specific young people with whom the projects have been working directly. Similarly, it is too early to detect wider trends in the prevalence of carrying or using knives.

Acknowledgements

Published by the City Bridge Trust,
City of London, PO Box 270, Guildhall,
London EC2P 2EJ
T: 020 7332 3710
E: citybridgetrust@cityoflondon.gov.uk
W: www.citybridgetrust.org.uk

Registered Charity: 1035628

Designed by www.luminous.co.uk
Written by Gerard Lemos
Photography by Janie Airey

Printed on Take 2 Offset which is made
from 100% recycled fibres sourced only
from post consumer waste.

www.fearandfashion.org.uk