“Breaking the fourth wall”

The 2010 Winston Churchill International Travel Fellow

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Field Trip to Baltimore (USA)
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Report
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For all the urban warriors, street people and Shadow people, who let me into their world
The term **fourth wall** applies to the imaginary invisible wall at the front of the stage in a theatre through which the audience sees the action in the world of the play. The term signifies the suspension of disbelief by the audience, who are looking in on the action through the **invisible wall**. The audience thus pretends that the characters in the story are ‘**real living**’ beings in their own world, and not merely actors performing on a stage or studio set, or written words on the pages of a book. In order for the fourth wall to remain intact, the actors must also, in effect, pretend that the audience does not exist, by staying in character at all times and by not addressing the audience members directly. Most such productions rely on the fourth wall. The term **breaking the fourth wall** is used in film, theatre, television, and literary works; it refers to a character directly addressing an audience, or actively acknowledging (through breaking character or through dialogue) that the characters and action going on is not real.
## Contents:

- Acknowledgments  
- Fellowship Aims  
- Executive Summary/Key Findings  
- The Journal  
- The Summary  
- The Gallery  
- The Recommendations  
- The Conclusion  
- Appendices
Fellowship Aims:

1. To look at models of good practice where addressing *fatherlessness, father hunger, and father deficit* amongst young men has created stronger communities.

2. To talk to International agencies about partnership working regarding addressing the impact that *fatherlessness, father hunger, and father deficit* has on communities.

3. To have a dialogue with those practitioners working on issues associated with *fatherlessness, father hunger, and father deficit*.

4. To develop an International networking data base of individuals, projects, processes, and practices that can be shared, as a way of raising awareness, addressing and solving the issues centring on, *fatherlessness, father hunger, and father deficit*.

5. To share any findings with colleagues, vested interests, partners, and policy makers to establish the evidence base for addressing relevant policy concerns centring on *fatherlessness, father hunger, and father deficit*.
Executive Summary/Key Findings:

1. *Fatherhood* – The impact of father hunger and deficit is an epidemic in Inner city Baltimore and has created a void with the overall life of the inner city itself.

2. *Criminal as victim* – In inner city Baltimore there is a hidden layer of criminal justice casualties; young men who have desisted from a life of crime, but have themselves become victims of crime.

3. *Poverty that forces you back into crime* - Having no money to live on, little or no healthcare insurance, limited employment and educational opportunities is forcing many young men back to the ‘corners’ as a way surviving and restoring lost masculine pride and status.

4. *Biography* - The need to access the stories of the real lived experiences of inner city people living in Baltimore is vital in terms of understanding what needs they have, and how solutions can be found to the problems they face.

5. *Accesses to constituency* – Researching in a place like Baltimore’s inner city requires a reframing of the ethical considerations required when undertaking an investigation that requires high risk.

6. *Secondary Victimisation* - Many young people are impacted by childhood neglect, abuse, and violence have major psychological issues that are not being addressed. The lack of support for these secondary victims in itself generates more victims, who themselves become perpetrators of acts of violence and abuse.

7. *Faith based conversion* - *(Finding a new father – God)* - The need for re-connecting to the Spirit became a fundamental need for many fathers, sons, and men I encountered in Baltimore’s inner city.

8. *Mentor as enabling a rite of passage* – *Individuals who can break it down* - The development of a holistic space and dialogue where academics, strategic players, and community can come together is badly needed in Baltimore’s inner city communities.

9. *Desistance* - Seldom do theorists engage in a discussion that looks at whether black men’s struggle to desist from involvement crime and disorder, is rooted within a socio-historical context.

10. *Community Businesses* - Raising the profile and development of community businesses within black communities is vital to increase the visibility of those services in the wider social economy.
The Journal
To be or not to be:
Today's thought is told through one of my favourite folktales. Marcus was sitting with Sankofa the wise man.
'Sankofa, is it better to starve and be free or is it better to live like a slave and have all the comforts in the world?' asked Marcus.
Sankofa smiled, and replied; 'A hungry wolf, which had been prowling through the forest in search of food, met a dog outside a farm gate.'
'You seem to be doing well. How do you keep so fat and sleek in wintertime? I am stronger than you, yet I am starving.' said the wolf.
'I earn my keep,' said the dog. 'I bark whenever strangers come to the gate, and at night I roam about the farm to keep away thieves. In return I get a snug kennel and food every day. The servants give me tidbits too, and sometimes my master throws me a bone from his own plate. It's a fine life. Why don't you try it?'
'I will indeed,' said the wolf. 'It seems I've been a fool to live so long in the snow and rain.'
'So the two set off to the farmhouse together. As they went along the wolf noticed a sore place around the dog's neck and asked what it was.
'Oh, that is the mark of the chain they use to fasten me up in the daytime. They think I'm restless, and it's true I can't help tugging on it.' replied the dog
'But if you want to go somewhere, will they let you?' asked the wolf.
'Why, no,' said the dog. 'Not during the day.' finished the dog
'So that is the price you pay for your fine house and food!' exclaimed the wolf, and he turned and ran back into the forest.
Sankofa left Marcus to reflect on what he had said

The trip:
Woke up at 4am tired, nervous, and combined with a strong sense of anticipation. It was when the taxi arrived at 5am I then realised there was no turning back. My Fellowship had well and truly begun. The journey from checking in, security check, and taking off was smooth and without a hitch. The months leading up to this moment have been filled with doubts, trepidation and questioning. Sitting on the plan I am feeling completely different. There is a strong sense that I'm going towards something and not moving away from something. Invariably this adventure will be a mixture of personal and professional and personal experiences that will fulfill a range of other vested interests. As I sit here writing I'm glad that I don't have my Black Berry and other distractions. I so much want to find me time that will provide me with much needed moments of calm and relaxation. This time last year I was quite ill and in need a change of pace and direction. The need to be reflective, creative and spiritual is ever present and will form the backdrop of how I must approach this trip. I would like to express a personal thanx to all of those people who have supported me in making this trip possible.
Was relieved to be met by the Urban Leadership's director David Miller. A great guy, who was most welcoming. Accommodation is first class, an apartment in a listed building once occupied by Woodrow Wilson. Another plus. First introduction to East and West Baltimore where most of the 'Wire' was filmed. At first I was excited as I remembered locations from the show. However, the sight of concrete, boarded up houses on mass, people standing around, juggling street running’s, brought back an unhappy reality check. Inner city deprivation at it's worse, going unseen by the vast majority of Baltimore's more affluent citizens. David took time to point out that there were a massive range of activities that are positive and productive coming out the city. What he wanted me to experience was the darker side of the city's landscape to get a sense of how his work is situated. I can see the parallels with life in the UK. A powerful start.

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What a day:
A very powerful day. First off we attended a meeting with David Miller and a Baltimore city council representative, Kevin Slayton. The discussion centred on a faith based response to engaging the community's fathers. The objective was to get the community actively engaged in looking at how the faith communities could be more active in enabling disconnected fathers to become more connected with their children. After that meeting had concluded, an ad-hoc conversation with a Baltimore police officer took place. We talked about many issues and compared the way police operate here and in the UK. An illuminating conversation. However, guns and their use dominated the conversation. A stark reminder of the difference in policing. They have guns, UK police don't. On the way to our next meeting David drove us across the city where the all too familiar site of derelict houses, boarded up houses, and a deserted feel to streets was quite eerie. David reminded me that people lived in those spaces. I observed a community memorial where a young person had been shot. A draped sheet with signatures, combined with brandy bottles, accompanied with flowers, highlighted how the community responds to the violence on Baltimore's streets. Finally, we ended up at an Obama funded fatherhood event in Washington DC. Sat in a couple of sessions, did some networking, before leaving to conclude the day at a nice Nigerian restaurant. A powerful day laced with some powerful insights and lessons.

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Urban Leadership Institute:
Today was spent in David's company at the Urban Leadership Institute. He gave me some valuable insights into how to turn community based ideas into business opportunities. Essentially this was a master class in social marketing, product development, fund raising, and occupying the market place. I attended a meeting with his publicist and observed how he manages his media work.
Once again using other professionals to market him and his work reminded me of what should happen in the UK. This was followed by a visit to a black owned bank. Having a strong sense of public service combined with a significant business mindset underpinned David's success. It is also important to point out that David is a powerful public speaker, a well connected community person, and passionate about his work. Reflecting on the day’s events I was reminded how few resources there were for fathers in terms of things designed to improve the relationships with their children. Clarity emerges, as the trip begins to take form. I then went to visit black owned businesses; a soul food restaurant and a bookstore. Each one connected to the community, with a large constituency. What was very powerful in both cases was the sense of commitment and service to the communities in which they served. Considering there were no grants available for running this type of business, you could see how running a social business can be both profitable and productive. Overall, another food for thought filled day. It was also the end of my first week. Time for a rest.

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Obstacles:
In the village of Carifa the King had a large boulder placed on a roadway. He then hid himself and watched to see if anyone would remove the huge rock. Some of the king's wisest subjects came by and simply walked around it. Others just looked at it and walked back the way they came. Many cursed the King for not keeping the roads clear, but none of them did anything about getting the large boulder out of the way. Now Sankofa the wise man came along carrying a load of vegetables and upon approaching the large boulder tried to move it to the side of the road. After much pushing and shoving, he realised he would have to resort to a different approach. So he found a large piece of wood nearby, jammed it underneath the large boulder and moved it to one side. Sankofa then picked up his vegetables and was about to leave when he noticed a purse that contained many gold coins and a note from the King indicating that the gold was for the person who removed the boulder from the roadway. The King appeared and congratulated Sankofa for being wise enough to move it.

"Why did you remove the boulder Sankofa?" asked the King.
"Every obstacle presents us with an opportunity to improve things" Sankofa replied. He then took one gold coin and handed the rest back to the King.
"Greed is also an obstacle. Selling my vegetables will get me what I need". Sankofa went on his way and left the King to ponder on what he had said.
As Sankofa wisely says 'Every obstacle is an opportunity to improve things'. Knowing how to remove them is one thing, what to do when they are removed in another. A big learning day.

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Community media:
Scraping the froth off of the deluge of glossy American TV, I'm captivated by something more significant; community media. I have gained valuable insights into the diversity of activities and approaches to looking at, engaging with, and solving some of the ongoing community issues here in Baltimore. Whereas, the big players on American TV go for ratings, advertising revenue, and project a class divide culture in television advertising and marketing, community broadcasting gives voice to the fundamental need for communities to be heard. Health, arts, enterprise, education, criminal justice issues, intergenerational, mental health, and so on are all solid platforms by which sections of the Baltimore community can find space to voice their issues in their own way. One such revelation was the Digital Youth Network. An excellent idea that sees the intersection of education and technology as both a tool for empowerment and innovation for young people in Baltimore. Another significant facet of community engagement in Baltimore is talk radio. Many of the issues that are skirted over on TV are addressed fully and comprehensively on talk radio. Observing community based media approaches such as this highlights a very powerful way communities can have a voice and liberate themselves from social and cultural invisibility.

Meeting with Phil:
Today I found myself meeting with Phil Leaf (Director of Mental Health Service - Youth Violence prevention) at Johns Hopkins University. With such an awesome reputation it was daunting at first, but Phil made me feel welcome. We proceeded to discuss issues of mutual concern, as well as him giving me a wad of new contacts, meetings, and leads. He has also provided me with space in his department to work from. In listening to Phil's wisdom and insights, I am reminded of much this trip is a learning experience. The following wisdom story underpins where I feel my head has been and now needs to be.

Community engagement:
Attended a meeting with the Baltimore City Schools director, community organisations, and Johns Hopkins. The meeting centred on community intervention programmes for high risk schools, who young people are experiencing some serious social problems. It was similar to discussions in the UK, however the presence of Johns Hopkin's made a big difference. I made a few inputs and felt comfortable with my sharing and level of understanding of the issues being discussed. The recurring themes were lack of monies, communities not feeling empowered by commissioning bodies, the absence of a coordinated approach to addressing the issues young people face. Many thoughts came to mind. Namely, why is there no transatlantic link that would connect us in the UK to those in the US, where there would be mutually agreed objectives for real partnership working.
When asking that question, the response was simply, no-one has really brought it to fruition. Not that it can't or won’t be done. It just requires proper coordination. On leaving the meeting I was introduced to Professor Sheppard Kellam, who was a founder member of the mental health department in Johns Hopkins that deals with young people and violence. His insights, passion, and understanding of the issues were overwhelming. Here is a guy who has conducted significant research studies, still based at the university, who gave me some of his time. He presented me with a journal of a major piece of research he and his colleagues had conducted over many years and suggested I study it as part of my own awareness of the international context for some of my own work. After about an hour I had to leave Professor Kellam who had other appointments. I thanked him and went on my way. In conclusion, the sheer numbers of those men in Baltimore who have been arrested, incarcerated, died, have joined gangs, and so on, brought me to another realisation. How is the impact of the loss of such a large volume of men managed by the families and communities who are left behind? As I reflect on my work on manhood, masculinity, with an emphasis on fatherhood, I realise that the journey may be long, but I'm actually on the right track.

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Court House:
Went down town Baltimore today. The buildings were great, the hive of activity was bustling, and I saw the beigest Barnes and Noble bookstore I'd ever seen. Downtown Baltimore means being next to the Harbour, a spectacular assortment of commerce and tourism. After buying a new book I decided to explore the city. Shops, offices, food places, all neatly wrapped around a stunning skyline. Then suddenly I stumbled across a beautiful but daunting building, the court house. Reporters lined the steps, and a strike force of custody officers waited to escort those just sentenced to prison. Then there it was, a large White van filled with about a dozen African American men, being driven away. I felt sad. Making my way back to the waterfront I saw a few people begging, lying on the floor, and those huddled in shop doorways. The contrast between rich, poor, black, white is stark. You can almost miss it if you don't look hard enough. I paused for a moment to reflect on what I'd just seen and then ventured into the biggest African American museum in Baltimore. I didn't know whether it was a lesson from history or a history lesson. Whatever it was, the small amount of people trawling around this beautiful building would suggest it's more of a tourist attraction, as opposed to a place to learn about not repeating mistakes of the past. Once again another challenging day. In saying that I had a light bulb moment and have started the development of a parent’s resource that I will want to bring to fruition on my return. My Baltimore mentor David, keeps pushing me on the issue of social concern combined with business, as a viable way of addressing issues ethically, combined with making some money. Another powerful day.

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Community connections:
Today I attended a very unique meeting. President Obama’s, Director of the White House’s National Drug control policy; R.Gil Kerlikowske was invited to address the East Baltimore Drug Free Coalition. The coalition consisted of a range of community people, strategic players, and local political officials. A variety of presentations took place from various community representatives sharing their experiences of, and responses to, the issue of drugs in the community. What struck me was the sheer absence of men from the community, which was the opposite in terms of political representatives, who were predominantly men. Each speaker had a different story to tell, some tragic, others challenging, all underpinned with an air of optimism. Erich March, a funeral director talked about the impact of burying young people had on the community he loved. His speech was moving, passionate, and tinged with sadness. The young people who spoke were very inspiring and called for the elders in the community to enable them to flourish. Key issues that emerged were:

1. The need for social marketing around community drug message promotion.
2. The key issue facing communities is a need for environmental change
3. Increased access to meaningful employment.
4. The problem should be rooted within a public health agenda

President Obama’s representative talked about the need to switch the lens for addressing drugs in the community, from a one of criminal justice, to more of a treatment agenda. The sheer weight of the problems the community was facing was frightening and begged a question; treatment agenda or criminal justice; can the underlying issues that create drug culture really be addressed via political means? It reminded me that in the US, there is not the level of local democracy we have in the UK, hence the community has to take care of itself. Access to treatment, resources, healthcare, education, and so on are all things in the UK we take for granted. Here in Baltimore, nothing can be taken for granted. I left the meeting with a very clear thought about what need to happen both here and in the UK. Communities need to own their own research agenda, and provide steer to be researched with as opposed to being researched on. Knowledge is power. Those who have the insights coming from the outcomes of research are in a much more powerful position than those who don’t. Owning and controlling the means of production and distribution of your own identifiable needs has to be a core priority for communities if they are to survive in diminishing resource environment.

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Brother Bey:
Brother Bey is a 60 year old African American man, father, and ex-offender, who runs his own organization called F.O.X.O. (Fraternal Order of Ex Offenders). He is wise, assertive, and a no nonsense talking individual who believes passionately that ex-offenders should be more involved in solving problems associated with recidivism, desistance, and a whole a range of criminal justice issues. His passion comes across is every syllable. He doesn’t mince words or waste them.
Each statement is clearly articulated within a context that makes his arguments compelling. Brother Bey talks to me openly about his life, poor choices, the death of his son, and his philosophy about society in general. He makes it clear that he is not a victim, but was a willing participant in crime, that informs his current position as an advocate for ex-offenders. Brother Bey has many convincing arguments that are put in front of me with the speed of a racing car. I can also see where the potential conflict with his desire for academia to recognize his position arises. Universities are places of safety, hoarding ideas, and generating data that at times sits on shelves. Brother Bey wants to liberate this material and place it in the hands of those who can not only utilize the recommendations, but play a significant role in its implementation. Brother Bey reminds me about the UK situation and how my own desire to see more ex-offenders involved in designing and delivering programmes with disaffected youth can be thwarted by bureaucracy or plain fear. Brother Bey strengthens my argument for the development of a holistic space and dialogue where the academy, strategic players, and community are unified to bring about real and meaningful change.

Jill:
Jill is an African American woman, mother of three children, who works at Johns Hopkins University. Her reflections of parenting are compelling. In discussion it is clear that she is a devoted single mother, who has some real concerns about the future of her children. Interestingly enough, her views centre not on a mother with young children, but more about parenting at a time when they are old enough to fend for themselves. She describes how her children have been kept away from the streets and are quite spoilt. However, she starts to feel awkward at the prospect of them having to engage with the streets without the right preparation. I talk to her about how she can break down some of the issues and repackage them to her children who are quite formed in their opinions and view of the world. Jill tells me that a lot of the materials available are formulaic, predictable, and at times not parent centred or friendly. As a parent myself I hear and feel the anxiety of the struggle we have in terms of ‘letting go’. Jill made me think about my own battles with dealing with older children. On the one hand we want them to get older, leave us, and find their own way in life. On the other we fear for their future and still want to maintain some level of control over how they journey through the difficulties’ in life. Jill’s conversation highlighted the need for the development of resources that are creative, innovative, and driven by parental need. As parents we are all like Jill. We want the best for our children, don’t want them to make the same mistakes as us, and more importantly we want to see them escape the pitfalls and problems we encountered. Modern living, the need to earn a living, and trying to survive in difficult circumstances robs many of us of the time required to do that job properly. I think of my mum. She did a good job, stayed with us throughout our growing years, was always available, and loved without judgment. It takes common sense, but as I know, sense is never common.
Phil:
Phil is an academic who cares passionately for the community in which he is firmly attached. Phil is a workhorse who is dependable, loyal, and is very insightful. He is a mover, shaker, and someone who is incredibly well networked. Phil occupies an uncomfortable space. Inasmuch as he is paid individual in Johns Hopkins University, where community at times is absent. He is also very active in trying to ensure the community has a voice in forums designed to affect some level of change. A very difficult and demanding job that at times can split loyalties and create its own stresses. I learn from Phil that you can’t be all things to all people, but you must be true to your own values and beliefs. In conversation with Phil I begin to see how I myself must address some of my own misgivings about the vested interests for my work and services. Like Phil I have tried to serve many different interests and at times succeeded. But most of the time the failure has been serving the needs of others, as opposed to the issue I’m representing. Phil challenged me on many levels. One of the most important areas that I was confronted with is in ‘How do you bring your ideas to fruition?’ Many of us have great ideas, can make them sound wonderful, and all appear to be exactly what is required. However, If the resources, systems, methodology, or implementation strategies are flawed, then what do we do. At the core of a lot of what I do is in the process of evaluation. What I’m learning from Phil, is there are many different type of evaluation as there are types of ideas. Phil forces me to confront something fundamental, how will bring about the changes I speak about in a rhetorical way? In conclusion more time must be spent on deliverable outcomes that are not only achievable but sustainable. Clearly a lot of food for thought.

For the abandoned son’s of Baltimore:

Mum, Dad, and Me:
Imagine, a 6 year old boy walks up to his mother, tears in his eyes, saying he’d being bullied at school. The concerned mother shocked at her son’s revelation consoles him with a motherly hug. After calming him down, she delicately broaches the subject of the bullying.

Imagine then the 6 year old boy becomes angry, starts to stomp around the room, and pushing things over in his path. He screams out at the top of his lungs “they say that no having a dad means I’m stupid”.

Imagine then a mother taken back by her son’s outburst she begins the process of reassuring him that he’s not stupid. Then at the top of his lungs screams through tears repeatedly “Where’s my dad”? Where’s my dad”? Before breaking down in an uncontrollable fit of anger brought about by loss.

Imagine then, the same mother, looking at her son who has dropped off to sleep, wondering how she explains his father’s absence. She lies awake crying, struggling to comprehend what had just taken place, where confused thoughts entered her subconscious. The following morning her son apologies for being angry with his mom, who cannot bring herself to tell her child why and how his father disappeared.
Imagine that little boy going back into the school where he was bullied and the mother feeling paranoid at not knowing which parents were still together and which parents were not. She drops her son off, goes home and makes herself busy, not knowing what the future may hold. She confides in her friend, who says “If you ignore it long enough it would go away”. The mother feels relieved and unburdened whilst the scare of the young boy’s father absence has been deposited in his subconscious ready to recoil like a spring with anger, violence and depression as the search for the answer to the question about his father’s absence was swept under the carpet in an attempt not to protect the child but a mother who is too scared to face the truth.

Imagine, that that little boy went through adolescent, 20’s 30’s and 40’s carrying the burden of the most fundamental question that requires a proper answer when he was 6.

Imagine that little boy never enjoyed being taught anything by his father, never experiencing the love of his father, never feeling connected to family or community, never enjoying a proper relationship with a woman, combined with the struggle of his own parenting.

Imagine that child never felt whole.

Imagine if that was your son…

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Baltimore Blues (For the victim turned perpetrator):

Omar was just like you, a young man with a bright future. He had been bullied many times. He didn’t fit in. He never found it a problem, but others at his school did. They wanted Omar to be a follower … a clone … the same as everyone else. They didn’t want Omar to be an individual with his own thoughts, ideas, and feelings. They wanted him to be part of a crew, a posse, and a gang. With each day at school came torment, verbal abuse, and physical attacks. Omar tried to defend himself, but felt powerless. He couldn’t fight back. The other kids in school also laughed at him. They said Omar was weak … useless and rubbish. It got so bad that Omar started to believe that he was no good. No one listened to him … no one helped him … and no one understood what he was going through. Omar was alone, depressed, and very angry. Then one day Omar snapped. He’d had enough! He wasn’t going to take it anymore. It was time to stop the bullying. anger stood in the corner of Omar’s bedroom encouraging him to get even with the bully.

“Go on get your own back” anger whispered. Omar listened to anger closely and was ready to go into battle, when stupidity appeared and had a quick word.

“You need a weapon. Don’t leave without one” stupidity smiled. Omar listened closely and placed a small knife in his pocket. Stupidity gave Omar a pat on the back and sent him on his way. Omar left his house feeling confident. As he turned the corner, he was met by foolishness, who gave him some last minute instructions.

“You can take them all on Omar. Remember you’re invincible”. Foolishness whistled loudly as three new devious characters appeared to help Omar on his way. They introduced themselves as nervousness, anxiety, and fear. They gave Omar some good advice and told him they’d be with him all the way. Omar stepped off even more determined. Bravery looked a distance away and tried to call out to Omar.
“Don’t do this Omar” bravery called out, but stupidity put a gag over his mouth. So Omar never heard what bravery had to say.

“Omar” another voice called out. Omar stopped.

“My name’s temper. I need to give you some advice”. Temper whispered something into Omar’s ears, gave his blessings, and sent him on his way.

Meanwhile love looked on helplessly, as death danced up and down smiling. Omar reached the school playground and scanned around.

His eyes focused on the bullies. He started to feel strange and was met by an even stranger character.

“Omar, my name’s confusion, you’re going to be alright” Confusion gave Omar a reassuring hug before walking off, laughing. The bully spotted Omar, gathered his crew, and headed towards him. Omar started shaking. Suddenly the knife in Omar’s pocket started to speak.

“It’s good to meet you. Glad we’re working together” the knife said. “I hope you know how to use me”

“Of course I do. I won’t let you down” Omar said confidently. Omar was then joined by conviction.

“Remember, believe you can do this. Don’t back down. Do what you need to do” Omar’s heart pumped faster and faster and faster! The knife continued to talk to Omar and told him exactly what to do. Then the bully started verbally abusing Omar followed by pushing and shoving. Omar started to fight back. Then the bully slapped Omar hard across his face. Omar just lost control.

“Come on use me now” said the knife that sounded irritated that Omar was taking so long. Anger and rage appeared on the scene and came to Omar’s rescue. They stood either side of Omar and whispered in his ears. Omar screamed at the bully and then plunged the knife into his chest. There was a loud scream followed by a drop! The bully hit the ground screaming in pain. After a while he stopped breathing. Revenge arrived on the scene

“Well done Omar, you did it” Revenge smiled.

It was over! No more bullying .. no more torment .. no more pain
But for Omar there was no more freedom … Omar was 15 then … he’s 19 now. He has two new friends loneliness … and depression. They loved Omar and share the same prison cell. They talk to him all day and all night. Like true friends they’re always there for him. In fact they never leave him alone. Death sits reading a book in the corner of the cell. He’s in no hurry.

A potential young father?

‘B’ would best be described as threatening, menacing, and dangerous. An ex high level drug dealer, who needs to defend his ‘rep’ is something that he wears like a badge. ‘B’ stands out from many young people I’ve spoken with. ‘B’s response to the issue of ‘repping’ the community feels like a soldier defending his territory at all costs. After a range of challenging and searching questions posed to ‘B’, he eventually breaks his badness down with painstaking accuracy.
He explains that as a street warrior he is desensitized to street conflict and has little of no-sense of reconsidering another way of solving disputes with other street warriors. For ‘B’ vulnerability is not part of his street psyche, mainly because he feels he has no control over what he is feeling, and has been shaped by circumstances. ‘B’ nurses the headache of extreme social neglect. If you add an absent father, an on-going custody battle, and no prospects of employment into the equation, you can understand that this young man is on the brink of collapse.

‘B’ is clearly a case of someone who had been failed by the system multiple times. ‘B’ clearly understands his options are limited, but his desire to explore his creative potential as a means of making some legitimate money is ever present.

In talking to ‘B’ it was very evident that the barrier to his dreams and ambitions being fulfilled was a complete lack of confidence, self-belief, or self-esteem. Life, incarceration and a general lack of direction have robbed ‘B’ of the tools required to ‘up his game’ and succeed. Engaging ‘B’ with stories, anecdotes, and soft challenges opens up a window of light in a dark life. He becomes animated, glowing and manages to smile and laugh. It is a significant breakthrough in spite of all the baggage he is carrying.

As I watch ‘B’ begin to creep out of his shell I can’t help but reflect on the legions of ‘B’s’ wandering aimlessly looking for an opportunity to discover meaning and purpose to their lives. As I watch the latest new broadcast another young man like ‘B’ is charged with murder.

Talk Radio:

After a long drive, I arrived at the radio station where I was going to take part in Brother Bey’s ‘Breaking the Cycle’, a talk radio platform for ex-offenders. Brother Bey is powerful, controversial, and very much in control of both the mixing desk and his callers. The topic for discussion is about the role of academics in terms of solving problems for ex-offenders. Brother Bey’s caller reaffirms his views and commitment to their cause. This provides the contrast for his views that argue that academics per se are not at fault, but the system that excludes and bars access to meaningful services for those who have been incarcerated. Each caller has a story to tell, combined with some imparted wisdom to leave other listeners with. Brother’s Bey’s nephew delivers two powerful raps, whilst others debate and question each other’s points of view. As I sit here waiting to be interviewed I feel quite nervous as the subject matter and tone of the debate is not light listening. The callers have serious experiences and I’m here to address some pressing issues that Brother Bey Wants answers to. Brother Bey tells me he has little interest in my academic studies and has invited me on the show to discuss my work in prison and community. I feel passionate about what I’m doing and where I meander off into my own brand of rhetoric, Brother Bey reigns me in, by quoting Malcolm ‘X’, who said ‘Make it plain’. When I didn’t make it plain, I was quickly corrected.
Even though the time went quick I realised that this medium was one of the few avenues that ex-offenders had to both air their views, as well as having some of their pain validated by a host who not only understood their pain, but has guided it to a new position of healing numerous times. I felt good that I could be of some assistance, but I also realised that my presence was a mere token gesture. I left the show pleased with my input, and saw the potential of using talk radio in a context that would suit the type of work I’m currently doing. Yet again another learning experience.

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Black Masculinities:
7 black men sit in a room; a community activist, sociologist, a criminologist, a philosopher, a scientist, an educationalist, and a social worker. They are all there to discuss one thing how can black men become better fathers. After 4 hours of tense debate, analysis, and discussion, they cannot find common agreement as to the solution. The meeting ends. No solution but each man thinks he is right and goes away feeling happy with their contribution. A week later a young man is shot, several fathers go to prison, several women are victims of domestic violence, a range of young people are suspended from school, and the community begins to fragment and implode on itself. The same 7 black men meet again to discuss what can be done. For the first time in a long time they are forced to confront a painful truth. Namely, don’t hide behind professional labels. Kevin Powell’s new book of essays by various writers has a chapter that focuses on ‘Redefining black manhood’. The continuing need to address who we are as men, fathers, and sons should be on-going, constantly looked at and worked upon. One size does not fit all, but the desire to feel well, useful, have a role in community, raise the family, and so on are common goals for all of us to attain. However, black men have been defined on so many levels by the gaze of other people’s expectations that we have forgotten who we are and who we want to be. We spend so much time telling others ‘who not to be’ ‘what not to do’, that we miss out on promoting what we could be, should be and in many cases are. We’ve become so used to having conferences, seminars, workshops, and a host of interactive spaces to debate black men’s identity, ways of being, and so forth, that we seldom validate each other for just being able to smile, have fun, and live a normal life. Black men encounter problems, but we ourselves should not define our reality as being “problem men”. Clyde Forde when writing in ‘The Hero with an African face’ uses terms to describe contemporary black life such as ‘painful’ ‘despairing’ ‘scary’ ‘difficult’ ‘harsh’. He then goes on to show that the ability to overcome and survive in the face of adversity and oppression is heroic and should be celebrated. So my call is not for every black man to become the same, but to recognise you have the power within you not only to do great things, but to define things according to your needs, not those of other vested interests.

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The Wire:
The past few days have been emotional, taxing, and incredibly powerful. Like most people who hear the work Baltimore, the association with HBO’s groundbreaking drama ‘The Wire’ are interconnected and drive many people I know to develop a thirst for the show. Like most people I have consumed the series and wondered if my time here would enable me to see if Art did imitated life in Baltimore. What happened at this point could not be scripted, made up, or even planned for.

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Life in the game – Melvin Williams AKA Little Melvin:
I’m with Dr Phil on my way to met Melvin Williams aka ‘Little Melvin’. Melvin was described as Baltimore’s drug King Pin during the 70’s and 80’s, did a long prison sentence, and starred in the ‘Wire’ as the wise Deacon. Although Melvin’s reputation preceded him I had no expectations other than a chance to meet someone who had contribution to crime, making and losing a fortune, as well as becoming the stuff of legend. As we approached I saw a tall, slim, elderly looking man posing for a photograph. Somehow I felt it was him. I was correct. This guy who I had watched on the ‘Wire’ was standing in front of me.

After a brief introduction I was taken into a facility he had developed to help the community’s children. A large complex, boasting a basketball court, weights gym, boxing ring, a karate dojo, plus a huge second hand furniture warehouse gives you a sense off the scale of the space. Melvin’s greeting, charm, wit, extreme fitness and wisdom was staggering as it was insightful. At the height of his empire Melvin had amassed a fortune of over half a billion dollars. As I listened to him I was amazed as his power of recollection, ability to critique his past, as well as providing me with a history lesson on crime. Melvin did not glorify, celebrate, or make excuses for his past. His time in prison, witnessing and participating in crime, combined with lessons learned reminded me of the importance of understanding those who have committed crime, as a way of drawing new meanings and insights into a world that gets people a degree, enables scholars to write books, and documentary makers, films. It was hard to believe that that small man had done what he had done, and was comfortable with sharing his stories as opposed to a prison cell. In talking to him I discovered that in the ‘Wire’ Melvin was the inspiration behind the character Avon Barksdale.

Exciting as that was it was more significant to hear from the man himself about his life and times that consuming the mythology that surrounds him. Historically Melvin was dangerous, a true leader of gangland Baltimore, who at the age of 15 was a pool hustler, card and dice player, and rich. His graduation into a life of crime and subsequent incarceration is truly remarkable. Melvin’s sharp thinking and ability to share his wisdom with the community he has helped, in spite of his past, reminds me of something very special. He is a wise elder, a reformed criminal, and has served both as a demon and a hero to many. As I leave Melvin I can’t help but wonder if it was all worth it.
To have so much wealth and lose it, would have deeply affected most people in Melvin’s position. However, he casually accepts he got into crime, and more importantly he got out of it. The need to both understand and learn about Melvin burned deep inside, as a lot of the young men I saw running up and down the streets of Baltimore are Melvin’s in the making. I couldn’t help but wonder if they knew his story intimately whether that choice would still be an option?

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**Ted:**

As we are about to leave Doctor Phil hands me the phone and I’m talking to Ted Sutton. His greeting is warm and the offer of a meeting is made. Phil says Ted is someone who I should meet and spend time with. I was curious as to what would lie in store for me. I agree to meet up and wait for a call. The following day I’m picked up by a large car by Ted. Ted, a huge man, with an even bigger smile, greets me in a friendly and caring manner. As we drove off Ted begins to share his narrative, and reveals Melvin to be his mentor and close friend. I learn that Ted is an ex-strong arm man (Enforcer), who has participated in many acts of violence and crime, and like Melvin works on behalf of the community, as a gang mediator, mentor, and has a serious mission to save the lives of the hardest to access young men in Baltimore. Ted breaks it down in detail, from street warfare, gangs, crime, and more importantly how he found God. Ted talks about his family consisting of Civil rights activists, members of the Black Panther party, and an array of powerful elders in his life all connected for changing people’s lives.

Ted tells me that being the middle child with an older and younger sibling pushed him into a life of darkness and crime. The multiple deaths of his friends, constant street battles, and fear of incarceration culminated in being acquitted in a profiled court case and undergoing a faith based conversion all at the same time. The conversation is broken as we end up at a small apartment block. Ted tells me here is a young gang member who is in trouble and is looking to get out of the lifestyle. A young black emerges, climbs onto the van and exhales loudly as if deep pain. A phone call brings bad news. This young man was not happy, but also suffering from a deeper sense of insecurity, as he feels that no-one care for him. Being face to face with this young gang member was at first quite frightening. Not because he was a gang member, but a young man who was in a volatile state of mind. Ted spoke to him for a while, calming him down with reassuring words and a soothing tone. It was then Ted handed over to me and I began to engage him in conversation and anecdotes. In spite of numerous phone calls coming through, this young man listened and reciprocated with his own stories and testimony. I saw someone who was my daughter’s age caught in an impossible situation. A gang member, with no health insurance, money, job, or available means of support trying to do what society wants. To be compliant, law abiding, and trying to embrace a new lifestyle. What wasn’t happening is that same society being able to show him a way of achieving it. I discover he can draw. I give him a copy of my new children’s book.
He is amazed that someone has given him something. For a brief minute he is no longer a menace to society, but someone in desperate need of love, and was given something unconditionally. Researchers and community people alike all want to gain insights and understandings as to why young men join gangs and how can we change their fortunes and make the community a safer place. I looked at Ted and saw the answer. Access is via skilled mediators who the hard to access both trust and love. In Ted I saw a powerful advocate for street brokers, in the young man I saw extreme loss and a need to be welcomed back into a community he has terrorised. We embraced, I said goodbye and wished him well. We were off again. Ted tells me it’s all in a day’s work. Ted shows me a new facility he has created that will act as a half way home, therapy centre, and safe space for gang members trying to get out of the chaotic lifestyles they are leading. It is truly impressive and a testimony to another individual who has turned his back on crime and uses his real lived experience as a conduit for changing other people’s lives. Ted’s own story is tinged with loss, sadness, and a search for identity. Luckily he found one, others don’t. The conversation moves backwards and forwards like a piston. Never playing the victim, Ted recounts losing friends, hurting people, and how his change has given him purpose. At that moment we became real friends and not just professionals engaged in sharing techniques and methods.

Ted suggests we go for something to eat. A short while later, we are at a large complex referred to as ‘The Black Mall’. Namely, because the clientele, owners of the stores, and the general ethos is purely African American. First sight, 4 police cars attending a crime scene at a school nearby reminded me that this space has a history of conflict. Being surrounded purely by black people is at times a strange feeling compared to the UK. Unless you’re in the Caribbean it is highly unlikely to experience the density of non white people in such a concentrated space. I enjoyed it, but couldn’t help thinking about the young guy I had just met. In this Mall people had money, were eating, and generally there was a thriving economy. On the other hand there were so many people who were excluded or couldn’t be included here, that I wondered what it would be like to come here and have no money. This was both and affluent and economically driven environment that would send shockwaves to poor people, who I can imagine would be driven to despair if they couldn’t access the goods and services on offer. I thought of young black people in the UK walking up and down shopping centres in the same way, window shopping, walking with a swagger, and trying to cope with all the pressures of a society that excludes them so much. Once again legions of young people acknowledge Ted, as someone who comes into their school, homes, community, in fact any space where his services are required. He shares a story of entering a burning building to rescue people. A remarkable feat by a remarkable man. After a meal of chicken and fries, we’re off again on another mission, to go and see someone in an area called Park Heights. Park Heights is a typical inner city area full of deprivation, despair, and hopelessness. As Ted drives me around the community, there is an uneasy air of tension.
People sitting outside their houses talking, children on bikes, and other getting on with life. So why should it feel so fearful? Ted tells me the history of the area, what goes on, and says that this area is his patch. His description of the violence in the area manifests in me meeting with one of his young mentees. A young man who in attempt to get out the gang had been beaten up, shot, and left him a worse state. Glazed eyes, slurred speech, and a slight limp, shows me this young guy is in severe pain both physically and emotionally. Initially, he is quite distant as he doesn’t know me. Ted vouches for me and he begins to talk freely and smile. I realise that access to these young men in granted, not based on your status, money, or education. It is based on connecting to their pain and the world in which they occupy. Ted spends a while talking to this young guy about his well-being and how he is coping. Internally I’m feeling sad, upset, and impacted by a young guy who has done what society asks, come out the gang, but have been left with nothing. Like an abandoned child with no mother. He may be law abiding, but like the previous young gang member, he has no money, no job, little education, a prison record and a difficult future to face. A few moments later, we’re off on another mission. Leaving Park Heights I ask a difficult question ‘How did people get to this state? And how does one of the world’s richest places create the conditions for people to merely exists and survive?’

Bloods:

Night has descended; me and Ted are in a car park, face to face with a man sporting a red bandana. My first encounter with a member of the ‘Bloods’ gang is surreal, challenging, and insightful. Being granted an audience with him, followed by a meeting I will never forget was one of the most powerful experiences of my life. He was charismatic, intelligent, and truly a leader. The conversation did not focus on gangs, but more on fatherhood and society in general. The mixture of fear and exhilaration ran through my veins. This was no film set, it was real. 30 minutes later I was sitting in Ted’s car, whilst he and ‘the blood’ talked. I observed Ted brokering, negotiating, and mediating with skill and commitment.

I was truly impressed not only by Ted’s unswerving commitment to trying to make Baltimore a better place, but the gang member’s openness to reasoning and dialogue. Be under no illusion, any US gang member affiliated to the Crips and the Bloods is not a saint. However, they are men and fathers, who have made a choice that many find offensive, scary, and wrong. Be that as it may, they exist alongside us, occupying the same space, going to the same shops, taking their kids to school, and trying to survive in their own way. We can all have an opinion, view or judgement as to what is right and wrong. What I would say until you have stood face to face with someone like the guy I have just met, we will continue to believe the hype and moral panic that surrounds gang culture. Yes they are menacing individuals that have done all sorts of stuff. The truth is the solution for changing them will not be found in more incarceration, biased media coverage, or ignoring their existence. Gangs are a complex social phenomenon that requires more than just rhetorical posturing to sort it out. I don’t have the solution, but what I did learn today, it starts with dialogue.
But first you have to gain access. That access was created by Ted. The sad fact remains there are many guys like Ted, who don’t get paid, supported, and validated for what they do. Yet he saves as many lives as any paramedic or surgeon. After 12 hours on the road Ted says his will drop me home. Suddenly 5 White police officers arresting a young black women forces Ted to stop, pull over, take out a video camera and record what they’re doing. Ted archives stuff that happens on the streets as his want to make a documentary on the abuses that take place on a regular basis. Low and behold it is taking place opposite Little Melvin’s shop front. We stop off and talk with Little Melvin for about an hour before making our way home. I am thoroughly exhausted and take several hours to reground myself. What a day.

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Education:
Saturday morning. I’m with Dr Phil and Jonathan Bryce, the Executive Director of the Office of Student Support and safety for the Baltimore City Public schools system. We discuss the issues surrounding student’s safety, violence, bullying, and a raft of other issues that affect the pupils in Baltimore. The sheer scale of the problem is highlighted when Jonathan informs me about the array of assaults, weapons, and conflicts that have taken place in the city’s schools in the first few days of pupils returning back to schools. Our conversation goes backwards and forwards, centring on the problems, possible solutions, barriers, fears, and a whole host of issues. I find myself being emotional and responding both as a father and academic. It is clear that there are gaps to be filled in making the system better. I’m just not clear who is best placed to undertake such a task or whether the commitment to such an operation is viable bearing in mind the complexities of providing a balanced education for all young people. Deprivation, crime, assaults, children with multiple problems, were at the core of the problems, but the desire to get children educated seemed to outweigh the common sense principle of ensuring the well-being of children came first. I found myself back in the UK in my head. The same problem, approached in the same way with the same outcome. I walked away from the meeting clear that an educational solution would not solve this educational problem. It was deeper than that. This wasn’t about education. It was about the child who is scared to walk to school, the child who has had no breakfast, the child who’s fathers in prison and mother’s on drugs, the child with a gun or knife, the child who is dyslexic, the child who taking care of their family by having to work at nights, more importantly it’s about expectations and who manages them. As a researcher I felt good knowing there were issues I could investigate, as a father I felt empty. I shook hands with Jonathan and wished him luck with his future work. Myself and Phil were off to a funeral.

Funeral:
A young man lies in an open casket, legions of his friends cry, holding their pain in whilst family members go through the motions of losing a loved one. What made this funeral different was not the ritual send off which is at the core of black funerals. This funeral was that of a murder victim, murdered at a school reunion the week before. I learn it was gang related. Hence the legion of young men sporting blue standing outside.
The young man was associated with the Crips, the rival gang to the bloods. The members of his crew were connected to him, not his immediate family. A sad fact but true. This funeral was no ordinary funeral. It was one of many that happened so frequently, that it was a mere formality. Everyone paid their last respects, but expressed outrage as to the way in which his demise took place. I look around at the young men wearing blue, possibly armed, and in a stage of rage and revenge. The energy doesn’t feel good. I thought about Ted and all the young people I’d met the previous day. I reflected on Melvin and how a lot of these guys wanted to be like him. I then thought of my own children and grandchildren and felt despondent. This funeral was less of a send off and more of a celebration of a young man who made it into the dark side of immortality. Someone who will be remembered not for raising his children, getting a degree, or changing the lives of young people. He will be remembered for being murdered. I felt upset and left feeling worse than I did before I arrived.

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Pit Bull:

At home I get a call from Ted who swings around to come and see me. A young man hobbles out of his car and is introduced to me. This young man was shot in the neck, paralysed from the neck downwards, and miraculously made a full recovery. However, this young man is emotionally scarred by the experience, in turmoil, and barely functioning. Unable to cope with having a discussion he retreats the safety of Ted’s car. Ted recounts the young man’s history of crime and how he is has become yet another casualty of the social breakdown in Baltimore. I felt sad and impacted by the plight of this young man felt compelled to connect to him. A few moments later we were laughing and joking, sharing stories of Star Trek, and engaging in some uplifting dialogue. However, I could see in this guy’s eyes the kind of pain and terror that I had no connection to. Seeing him was the culmination of 48 hours of the most exacting period of my life. A relentless amount of interactions with extreme stories of powerless and loss. I didn’t feel good or take any comfort about being a criminologist who could shed some light on these matters. What really happened is I was confronted with an ugly truth; we are either part of the problem or part of the solution. Today I reframed my purpose in life and reaffirmed my commitment to being part of the solution. I thank my deceased mother for making me compassionate. Thanks mum.

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Too much:

In the baking heat of the Baltimore sun a constant recurring thought continues to plague my mind. How can I become so immune to the daily violent occurrences in a city that carries on regardless? Since being here there has been a murder per day. In spite of the shocking nature of these crimes, the frequency of occurrence deadens the emotions. The televisions report of murder presents the facts of the cases, without any real sense of emotion. You do witness the outpouring of anger, grief and sadness coming from victims, but it all feels surreal. A few murders that stick in my mind are one committed by a young woman aged 13, a case of a robbery gone wrong.
A hate crime involving a young African American man who claimed he was motivated by his crime purely based on his hatred of Mexican people. An even more surprising murder focused on a church pastor who hired a hit man to kill a mentally ill man on account of an insurance scam. On first arrival it was frightening, but as time goes on it feels different. It’s not a passive acceptance of extreme behavior, but it feels like a coping strategy for deep feelings of loss. This morning on Television I am bombarded with images of the 5th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, the floods in Pakistan, the worsening economic crisis, contrasted with millions of adverts pushing burgers, cosmetics, cars, electronic devices, and a host of other products that are designed to cushion the blow from dealing with the reality of inner city life. The functioning of US media definitely numbs the senses towards the wider issues of social, cultural, and spiritual importance. When I am down town in tourist mode I enjoy the environment like going to a large fun fair, safety, fast food, and relaxation acts as a form of screen saver.

The contrasting images of inner city reality consisting of boarded up houses, community survival, and individuals try to cope in difficult circumstances, probably explains why the trivial aspects of US society is appealing. It provides a strange balance of the senses. However, once you scrape off the froth, you can see the substance underneath. I’ve decided I don’t want to be in denial or be desensitized to things going around. Why? Quite simply, I have a conscience. I can’t take on every problem or solve every problem, but those victims, perpetrators, those living in impossible conditions, and anyone who is affected by decisions beyond their control, could all be me. I am them, they are me. If I ignore what is taking place for the sake of my own personal comfort, then I will be living with a sense of false consciousness. As I conclude this moment, I realize that the media succeeded for a brief moment in disabling my desire to see significant change within communities. However, I’m back to reality, not believing the hype, and even more committed to ensuring these terrible moments I’ve encountered don’t slip into my sub-conscious never to surface again.

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Community development:
In a previous blog entitled ‘Community Engagement’ I concluded by stating ‘Owning and controlling the means of production and distribution of your own identifiable needs has to be a core priority for communities if they are to survive in diminishing resource environment.’ The intent behind this statement is to begin to unpack the uncomfortable truth behind my statement. In a time of uncertainty, diminishing resources, and on-going changes within the social and cultural infrastructure, how can communities take a more active role in not only determining their own needs, but actually bring those aspirations to fruition? David Miller of the Urban Youth Institute has repeatedly challenged me in this area, emphasizing that the development of an autonomous model, rooted within both a community and business model. The emphasis here is on the word model.
Most of what I’ve experienced in my life has been addressing and responding to models of practice, ideas, development, etc that have previously existed. Seldom has there been space, time, resources to consider the design, development, implementation of a contemporary approach to this issue. This position is not idealistic, more aspirational. Having attended the Johns Hopkins Centre for Teen violence prevention and read its core objectives, I’m convinced that there is the possibility of framing a model that could with the right strategy could bring some different results to the way communities are currently served in the UK. In deed the recent Government’s position on wanting to enable communities to take more of an active role in shaping their needs provides less of a challenge, but more of an opportunity. To talk about and address ways of increasing community autonomy is a welcome opportunity that I am hoping will attract other community members reading this to consider my proposal. Namely, communities can with the right model be more in control of their own destiny.

In the case of Johns Hopkins there is a definite commitment for the University to work with communities, leaders, public bodies, and so on, to encourage wider participation in local democracy, and to quote ‘mobilise residents, and researchers to craft effective solutions for violence prevention tailored to suit their specific needs’. It is my view and passion to extend that objective, by presenting an adapted version. I do feel that Universities have a responsibility to play an objective coordinating role in terms of providing steer on community need. However, the weakness of that position is rooted in the historical legacy of disconnectedness that Universities have with communities. It is also evident that communities who have been researched on and not with for many years, have a healthy skepticism about University need to engage communities outside of their own research agenda. The politics of social and cultural change would also suggest that liberal university departments are still at the mercy of political decisions that can restrict their involvement within the community.

In today’s evidence based culture public services can place an enormous burden on community services that may not be geared up to deliver programmes alongside conducting the kind of critical evaluations required to justify their funding. It is also true that University departments who can provide the evidence are also not ideally placed to deliver the outcomes of their investigations. What is clear is ‘gathering, understanding, and interpreting’ data for the purpose of improving, changing, or challenging the status quo is an important process, as part of social and cultural change. As the Director of the Johns Hopkin’s Centre for the Prevention of Youth Violence reminds me “One thing is to know what to do, the thing is to know how to do it”. Therefore, models such as the one I want to outline actually start out from a rhetorical position as its very formulation as a thought is idealistic. It is in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation, where it will be seen to either work or not. The following framework is designed to present a model of community development. The community ….
• **Identifies a need**, addressing parenting issues, educational deficits, etc.

• **Gathers the evidence** by training community people to access and interpret data from books, academic reports, public service documents, etc. Community members would be encouraged to increase their knowledge by taking relevant educational qualifications.

• **Develops a resource proposal**. This proposal would reflect the identified need. It would use the P.O.S.E. strategy (Glynn 2010) as a way of evaluating its viability. Community members should be involved at every level of the proposal development, as a way of continuing development of transferable skills.

• **Identifies those (re) sources** who can enable the outcomes of the proposal to be owned and sustained. Targeted networking and engagement of potential investors and sponsors should be employed at this stage.

• **Creates a delivery mechanism** built on the principle of collective responsibility, not hierarchical status. A cooperative approach will tie each participant in the project as a stakeholder with equal responsibility and ownership.

• **Works in partnership** with the University to create a community-centred evaluation strategy. Community members would be encouraged to increase their knowledge by taking relevant educational qualifications.

• **Evaluates the findings** and feeds the outcomes/recommendations into the relevant public and social policy concerns. Each community member should actively involve themselves in this process, as a way of presenting the findings in ways that will create the most impact.

• **Will use arts based social marketing techniques** as a way of informing the community at all stages of the project’s development and implementation. Using this approach ensures the community is not just recipients of the intended changes, but playing an active role in its promotion throughout. I have witnessed this approach whilst working in Jamaica and found it to be a powerful tool of empowerment for the community.

• **Develops products and training materials** for community members to build tools for empowerment, awareness raising, and strategic development.

As stated previously I have merely outlined a framework. What is required after this is to create the time to consult with the community, edit accordingly, and then build some structure around the framework? A community activist in Baltimore encouraged me to not just think outside the box, but dare to be different in terms of auctioning any ideas I come up with. One day I hope to prove him right.

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**Deficit:**

A staple of inner city survival is what psychologist Richard Majors calls ‘Cool Pose’. Basically, developing notions of ‘street cool’ masks the deeper issues bubbling below the surface for many young black men in Baltimore.
The swagger, attitude, and intimidating presence of these young street warriors distorts the underlying fears, anxieties, and challenges they face on a daily basis. The all too familiar individual stories of social neglect, lack of educational opportunities and different life chances has created a fatalistic generation. These young men are not borne into privilege, awaiting inheritances, or in some cases have a guaranteed future. They are part of a generation struggling to do what society asks of them. Their assertive postures, brashness, and lively personalities, makes you realise how strong they are, contrasted with the vulnerability of uncertainty. Listening to them it’s easy to forget that they live in a restricted environment, face oppressive forces such as gang culture, and are constantly exposed to a crumbling inner city infrastructure, all neatly wrapped around a public service agenda whose vested interests compete for the valuable data they provide for policy makers and practitioners alike. Anger has become a central focus based on the cumulative deficits and negative encounters they have experienced throughout their lives. In has become evident that the word ‘Rage’ has now replaced ‘Anger’ and has become part of their current vocabulary. The cumulative impact of social problems, identity concerns, combined with a general sense of hopelessness & despair has pushed many young people to limits of anger that is harmful to them, their peers, their families, as well as the community.

It is true that there are many books, programmes, workshops, and activities designed to discharge and eject anger from our lives, but in order to access those resources, one first has to be accessed. Another feature of their responses centred on ‘Silent anger’. The sort of anger that bubbles just below the surface and hides in the shadows of their sub-conscious. At times this type of anger goes unnoticed, unchecked, and is not detectable. If triggered or released the outcome is detrimental to friends and family who have to pick up the pieces once the bomb has exploded. A frightening aspect and by product of young men’s anger and rage is the restrictions it places on their learning. Many young men are struggling to find a sense of purpose within their families, schools, and community, and believe that peers provide them with what they need. The continuing desire to join a gang, engage in anti-social behaviour and risky lifestyles, combined with the need to carry a weapon as a form of protection has become the norm for many of these young men, who are not big, bad, and dangerous, but scared, frightened, and lost in a world that increasingly is rendering many of their aspirations obsolete.

The vast majority of these young men are functioning, positive, and healthy. However, at the tail end there is chaos, mayhem, and turmoil. The need for a father and to experience positive fathering is on an epidemic scale, and should be treated as a public health issue. All of the young men spoken to had absent fathers who were not around for a whole series of reasons. The impact of this area of young men’s lives cannot be underestimated or ignored. Once again there are many books, research reports, programmes, activities, workshops, conferences, and seminars designed to improve and address this situation, but research would suggest that many of those young men have ‘opted out’ from wanting to address their feelings on this issue, and find solace in their crew and extended peer group. For some young men the issue of ‘being a man’ is a continued problem.
It is evident that many of their fathers left the relationship and handed over the responsibility for being ‘the man of the house’ to the son, who is ill equipped to deal with such a role. However, the need to protect mum and show family leadership has placed many young men in a role that at times brings them into conflict with mum’s new partner. This makes matters worse as it compounds the isolation of some young men who cannot actualise their own sense of masculine identity. The young man, who loves his absent father, may choose to defend his father’s honour. The result is more chaos, confusion, and possible conflict. If we don’t address this deficit then the implications will have devastating consequences.

We Wear the Mask by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906)

We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,--
This debt we pay to human guile;  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,  
And mouth with myriad subtleties.  
Why should the world be otherwise?  
In counting all our tears and sighs?  
Nay, let them only see thus, while  
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries  
To thee from tortured souls arise.  
We sing, but oh the clay is vile  
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;  
But let the world dream otherwise,  
We wear the mask!

Dunbar’s poem for me is a metaphor for what I’m experiencing here in the US and the UK. The community doesn’t have the resources, the academy doesn’t have the solutions, and the public services don’t have the insights. Somehow the partnering of this trinity is supposedly the answer. The reality is far from the ideal of collective working for social and cultural change. The sheer weight and scale of the problems means that whoever controls the resources pushes the agenda forward. Dunbar mentions ‘We wear the mask that grin and lies’, a truism if ever there was one. When we are all looking for a justification for our ideas and validation of our thinking, we are all colluding with creating the illusion of real change. As I look at the streets and observe the disparities between the races, the poor, the young, and so on, there are so many masks being worn, that it’s hard to see a unified position that we can all occupy and feel equal. How we prioritise need, determine who should get the benefits, or receive something to help solve a problem is so subjective and loaded against those who are powerless, disaffected, and at the margins of society. Dunbar talks about tortured souls.
There are many tortured souls out there whose mask has fallen off and we can see who they really are. Therefore, there is a need to question who is really wearing the mask.

Dear Baltimore:

A police station interview room. A young African American man is handcuffed to a table, whilst ex African American police chief Howard ‘Bunny’ Colvin, stands in the corner firing questions, designed to get the young man to furnish answers around a rage of fictitious scenario’s. Into the mix we have a White researcher, Professor David Parenti, who attempts to take copious notes on the same table where the youth sits. It is clear that the White researcher is using the ex police chief as a ‘broker’ designed to get the young African American man to open up. The barrage of questions combined with the intrusion of the Parenti’s bungling attempt to gain insight into the young man’s life erupts into a violent confrontation, where the young man, who is clearly a victim, is forcibly restrained. The scene described is from series three of groundbreaking HBO series ‘The Wire’, where the outcome is disastrous when the researchers desire to gather data outweighs his understanding of the young man’s social reality. Needless to say the interview is terminated, the White researcher was shocked out of his system, and the ex-police chief’s cynicism in research grew. The sad part of the whole scenario was that what could have been an important insight into inner city deprivation, black criminality, and black rage, was missed because of a methodological error. As fans of cult US television series The Wire will know, Baltimore is portrayed as a city with problems; racial divisions, corruption, gang- and drug-related violence and the effects of social deprivation on every level of society. Does art really imitate life?

Lexington Market

My guide and support Ted arrives at midday and takes me to Lexington market, a space teeming with stalls and masses of people talking, sharing, a long established community with a long history. At first glance you get the feeling that this is just like any other market day, where the community it out in force doing its daily shopping. It’s a powerful place to be, where all sorts of people are jammed into the building; eating, talking, planning, and observing. Ted explains this is the place to find stuff out on that’s happening on the streets. His reflections of his time spent here remind me that this space at times has been fraught with uneasy tensions, unpredictable behaviours, and conflict. On leaving a see an elderly woman, who is on drugs, begs, and is in a continuous state of decline. A usual and often occurrence Ted assures me.
City Springs Academy
As the downtown skyline disappears I find myself outside City Springs academy. We are let in and are face to face with a group of young men aged 14. All African American, all from the inner city, and all involved in a leadership programme run by a one of Ted’s mentees Bredon. Ted introduces himself, then me. For about an hour we swap stories, anecdotes, and in general make a connection with them. When the young men begin to share their testimonies words like fear, loss, drugs, violence, guns, gangs, and fatherlessness cascade like a waterfall. In spite of their outward confidence, these young men are living in extreme circumstances, trying to survive. I reflected on my own son, grandson and tried to imagine how they would get on here. The paradox of such a thought was on the one hand I would like them to be exposed to this situation as a learning curve, but in reality I was happy that they weren’t. An American football style huddle brought the session to a close and we were off to our next destination.

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The Projects:
The term project is a much used term by African American comedians, but in actuality inner city housing that gives rise to tension, anger, drugs, and violence is no joke. Similar in size and stature as in the UK, these estates feel more daunting because of their awesome reputation. Ted tells me about how they came about, the politics of social landscaping, and his frustration in poor city planning. I can’t disagree with him. I look at the people who live here; pushed to extreme limits of frustration know that their social mobility is almost fixed with little chance of escape. I didn’t like the environment, as people with no room to breathe will exhale, usually with dangerous outcomes. However, the sense of community spirit was as strong as could be in light of the situation that most found themselves in. As we left the area I came face to face with D.C.C., aka Diagnostic Correctional Centre. A large prison, with a large population, inside a large city. On this hot day here I was sweating, I thought about the prisoners. The acceptance that little could be done for those in a city where life expectancy was low, and worse of all prison is a year round, 24/7 reality for section of the community, who spend more time in this monstrous building than they do with their children, friends, family and community.

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Park Heights:
Driving through park heights again I meet an 8 year old boy who I am told had been selling drugs to provide for his family. He is cute, riding a bike, voice hasn’t broken, yet he is a seasoned young look out, drug dealer, and provider for his family. I’m saddened at seeing him, and even more upset knowing that school offers no prospect of assisting him to find a new future. More importantly his childhood has all but gone, before he has started his journey in life. A terrible feeling, imagine what it must be like for him.
Two young men:
I’m back at Little Melvin’s flea market, an enterprise that is open 24 hours a day, accompanied by a food stall, and clothes shop. Like the Wire there is a boxing gym, half built, complete with trainer and raw recruits. I learn from this community stalwart that no-one is allowed to box unless they improve their education. A great slogan ‘No hooks, without books’. As class belongs to start I move to one side and let them get on with it. Outside I get a drink and am called over to meet two young men. One young man boasts about his tattoos, whilst the other describes an attack at the local shopping mall on his way from school. Both 15, both out there on the streets, and both telling me like it is. It’s painful to hear their stories. One of the young men describes the pain of losing 13 of his friends to murder; a similar number comes up for the other one. I ask them what is the single most important thing they need in their lives right now? Their heads drop, no smiles, just a sharp intake of breath, followed by the same request ‘I’d like my friends to come back’. I felt gutted, inadequate, and unable to grasp the enormity of the pain they were carrying at that moment in time. I reflected again on my own children, knowing these guys didn’t have a father between them. I told them to stay strong, gave them a hug, and asked Ted to take me home. Art may impersonate life, but life is real, not constructed, slickly edited, and can be switched off at any time. Once again I’m both moved and saddened by what I’ve experienced today. In saying that everyone I did meet was resilient, didn’t feel sorry for themselves, and never played the victim. Life was short and in many cases brutal. They were determined to live it the best way possible. A lesson learned. Be grateful for what you have.

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Reading:
Whilst being here I have been reading and writing a lot. The trip has given me much needed space to document and revise some of my thinking. I was given a journal at Johns Hopkins University on Biomedical and Psychosocial approaches to drug and alcohol dependence, as well as purchasing Gottfredson’s and Hirschi’s ‘A general Theory of crime’. The relevance of my point here is not so much the content of each of the materials, but more about the importance of the provision of evidence through the process of investigation. Attending a meeting in the community I was painfully aware of how community services see themselves at data gatherers on behalf of commissioning agencies. In itself it is not a wrong situation, providing that the partnership is open and transparent. I still have issues regarding this unequal union, as I feel communities are ideally placed to not only gather the data, interpret it, as well as providing recommendations to vested interests. It then struck me about notions of power and how it all works. Parents can define the research, undertake it, and with the right resourcing see their tested hypothesis come to fruition with practical results. I would like to see a time when community can research its own needs and influence public, social, and cultural policy. It may be a cheaper option than currently exists. When I asked Phil about if these things were possible, the answer was not no! but the question I’m raising is seldom asked.

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Homicide:
I’m sitting in a large theatre space (Morgan State University) as a delegate at the 1st Baltimore Homicide Victims Conference. Stalls, politicians, support services, combined with a relatively small audience are the order of the day. I was intrigued how a conference would address, inform, and raise awareness towards homicide would play out. Since being here I’ve been exposed to the reality of how the streets can devour young lives for the sake of turf, revenge, retribution, robbery, mistaken identity, hatred, and numerous other reasons. The atmosphere felt quite heavy, not just because of the subject matter, mainly because many of the attendeess of the conference were victims of homicide. Myself included, as I had lost several cousin to violence in Jamaica many years ago. I’ve also lived in communities in the UK where lost of life through murder has been on-going for most of my life. A few keynote speakers contextualized the issues, followed by panel members who had all lost loved ones to homicide. The outpouring of grief was painful, hard to listen to, and at times harrowing for both audience and panel members alike. The other outcome was the way in which the panel’s grief, connected to the audience’s pain, and then it ceased to be a conference, but more of a grieving ritual. Individuals crying, breaking down, struggle to maintain composure reminded you how this type of crime took the human spirit to a place that was so difficult, that you can’t help but wonder how many people coped or didn’t cope with such a tragic event in their lives. The initial new, court case, picking up the pieces, coping strategy, and gap that is left when your loved one is taken from you, confronts the senses with dread, dread, and more dread. Each person talked about the isolation, loneliness, loss of friends, inability to talk about locked in feelings, helplessness, anger, rage, and depression. So many emotions that at times made many feel suicidal and questioning their faith. A belief in God was the corner stone of many of the victims, but even maintaining a spiritual belief became a daily battle, as the cumulative impact of the other emotions at times made little room for spiritual connection.

I thought about all the young people I had met from the streets, those walking around who were not dead, as they had survived a beating, or a shooting. Those who felt their life was futile but were forced to exist in a culture of despair and hopelessness. I then started to reflect on the daily diet of TV shows that were full of glamorizing crime and violence. It then struck me that a lot of what I’ve encountered being here, when it comes to the extreme outcome of violence is many people are suffering from trauma, contrasted with being de-sensitized. At times the casual acceptance of violence as the only alternative to solving disputes, the lack of sentimentality to the on-going struggles of street warfare, and the jostling for services who can provide solutions, made you feel that this epidemic was part of an industry. Then I started to think about prison, criminal justice, and the system itself. The sheer number of murders, victims, hospital costs for dealing with the victims, the psychological breakdowns, the increase in personal and community anxiety, proliferation of gangs, enforcement, and the list goes on. I then came to the realization that for society homicide is a huge issue; cultural, political, historical, spiritual, and psychological, that has been around from the beginning of time.
I left the event feeling grateful for my life, the people that love me, and things that I have. I pledged to myself that this experience would not be forgotten and would drive me to continue to understand the issues, get beyond the rhetoric, and never forgetting the level of human suffering it brings.

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From a lost and found son:

Having met so many young and older people here, male and female who have been fatherless, I have been asked on several occasions where my passion comes from, and what is it I know about the issue. It is for that reason I have decided to present my own story. Those without fathers are walking around with pain, looking for love, and are struggling to find internal peace. The need for a father, the desire for the love of a father, and the importance of having someone to connect your whole being too cannot be underestimated. So much research, so many books, so many hypotheses have been tested to ascertain the psychological impact of his absence, the relationship to crime, and numerous Gazes which at times border on being voyeuristic. The following testimony is not aimed at anyone in particular. It is not designed to be fed into any research, or add weight to a policy document. It is whatever it means to the reader. For ease of reading it is presented in a serial format:

Part One – Beginning

I only met Astley Roy Moore, (my natural father), who was a Jamaican, a handful of times. Once when I was eight, when he was introduced as my uncle. Being so young and totally consumed with the excitement of meeting him, I was pacified by his entrance into my life. He then proceeded to buy my affection on a shopping trip that lasted no more than a few hours. I never questioned his absence in my life as I was too busy being with ‘Dad’ (A term I never used with him). I thought I’d arrived now I had my father back in my life. I stuck two fingers up to all those people who made me feel the stigma of having an absent parent. I felt complete. It was a false reality! After a meal, he took me back to the designated rendezvous point, dropped me off, and that was that. It was 24 years later before I would see him again. Most of my formative years were spent thinking that he really cared for me. When I check it, I never ever had a birthday or Christmas card, heard his voice on the phone, benefited from his wisdom; absolutely nothing at all! I never had any sense the impact his absence would have on me until later in my life. How could I, I was too naïve, and inexperienced? I bought the lie, as the pain was too difficult to comprehend. Deep down I was dying inside. A feeling that has stayed with me. It’s a feeling you never quite come to terms with, and suppress in order to survive. As the years rolled on I hoped and prayed I would meet him again, go on an adventure, and act like nothing had happened. I was totally blind and deaf. I didn’t listen to my inner voice and conveniently ignored my mother’s hurt. I needed a scapegoat. Something that I have since rectified, but I know my anger opened up a wound within her, which only healed during her battle with cancer as I made my way back.
The Prodigal son comes to mind. Only is my case it was my mother not my father who welcomed me back home after I had gone out into the world and lived a turbulent life. I know that mum is at peace, which has aided my journey into my own healing. Jill Roberts, a white woman from Wales, who in 1955 Great Britain fell in love with this handsome Jamaican. A brave and courageous gesture way back then. To have me, lose the man she loved, and still manage to make a life for herself, was truly remarkable. She never gave me up for adoption (A common occurrence during the 50’s). Weaker women would have crumbled, but my mother demonstrated the kind of courage I am only now discovering. When I met my father many years later, I had to cope with yet another major blow; he had had a stroke as well as being married to a woman who didn’t know I existed. His illness restricted the things I so desperately needed to say to him, causing me more anxiety.

During our brief moments together we shared some important times, but the opportunity to offload my hurt never arose. How I wanted to shout, scream, and curse, but I respected his illness and went with the flow. If he had good health I may not have been as tolerant, as I had an extremely bad temper, which I couldn’t control. One of the major benefits to come out of our meetings was the introduction to my Jamaican family (Who I am still in touch with). It was at this point my road to recovery took off. My disjointed identity started to piece together. During my first week on my Jamaican sojourn where I was to be re-united with my new family, my father passed away (in London on NOV 4th 1989).

I had so many mixed emotions, anger, vexation, confusion, and betrayal. I was too distraught to focus. I’d been robbed! Things were made worse when I had to deal with the aftermath of meeting and losing him in such a short space of time, with no counselling whatsoever. I was a real mess. Like a desert mirage all those years of searching had disappeared in front of my eyes. His wife made it doubly difficult by refusing to let me see my father’s ashes on my return. A sort of payback for his deceit about the child she never knew he had. They’d been married for 16 years. Even when he found love he lived a lie. Although I never really got a chance to know my father, I developed a real strength of character during his absent years, which made me fiercely independent. Unfortunately my formative years were spent with my natural white mother and bigoted white stepfather, Ted Glynn. This led to major confusions about my identity and sense of where I fitted in. As a person from a ‘mixed race’ background I felt lost, alone, vulnerable, and disaffected. My stepfather and I were not close. Despite never being there for me emotionally, he was the only man I ever knew in the capacity as a father figure at that time. He did his best, but at the time I never knew that, and certainly didn’t appreciate it. Not having had a real grounding with an adult man, who I felt loved me enough to teach me about life crushed my self-esteem. I became locked in adolescence well into my late twenties and early thirties. At school I refused to accept my real father was flawed, despite the level of abuse and name calling my so-called friends would give me for not having him around. At school I was too Black for the White kids, not Black enough for the Black kids. I hated being called Half-caste by everyone. I wanted to be like my father, a Black man.
Growing up in a white family without any black input got worse as I craved the love of my black family who were in Jamaica, and didn’t know I existed. It was at this time I discovered a way of covering the pain. I became a clown. Happy on the outside ...sad on the inside, always the life ‘n’ soul of the party. Keeping my absent father’s memory alive was pure charade, which worked at first, as I never really needed to call upon my emotions to survive. As I hit my late teens it started to affect me the first of many depressions. My inability to talk to about my pain, and the continuing pressure of racism in the home caused me to withdraw and hold my mother responsible for everything. I was in complete denial, brought on by confusion about my identity. I became violent, uncontrollable, and carried hate around like a weapon. I projected my anger at anyone who made me feel vulnerable. I was out of control. Not only did I hate the world at large, but also I couldn’t stand myself. I was determined everyone was going to pay for my predicament. I remember vividly how submerging myself in work, politics, relationships, and other pursuits cushioned me, enough to falsely convince my mind that everything was fine. I had to wait until my late thirties before the bubble finally burst. One day I had written a full length screenplay and needed a crucial bit of information about my mother and father’s relationship. I asked mum how my father had left her. When she told me I was devastated and broke down. I was no longer able to hide, run scared, or cover things up. I wept endlessly and finally had to come to terms with his act of betrayal in my life. My father was no longer a hero, the person on a pedestal. Instead he had become the man who left me, my mother, and more importantly his responsibility in favour of finding a new life for himself.

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Shadow People:
Throughout my journey in life I have encountered many amazing people whose stories have gone with them to their grave, have not been told, been ignored, or have been too uncomfortable for many to hear. Having been part of Baltimore’s inner city community I have heard and listened to many stories from those I refer to as ‘shadow people’. These individuals are always present in our lives, but linger in the background. Many ‘shadow people’ are socially labelled as ‘Hard to access’ or ‘Hard to reach’. In truth they are neither. They merely exist in their own world of darkness and fear, a world that they are familiar with, and one that generates fear within us. Other ‘shadow people’ are victims of circumstance; losing loved one’s in tragic circumstances, struggling with a terminal illness, coping with a mid-life crisis, or struggling with the day to day running of having a mental illness. The need for space to reflect, think, have fun, and generally explore the world has diminished over the years. As a child growing up I remember, how much space I used to occupy, when streets were safe, youth clubs were about adventure, and open spaces weren’t restricted. Young people now share stories of not being allowed into shops, where shopping centre’s restrict their movement, older people feel a threat from their presence, combined with the daily struggles to occupy space in their own houses. Being a step-child who doesn’t have a bedroom, living in an environment which has limited access to facilities such as sports, parks, outward bound, and so on, has created a generation craving their own space.
We now have young people who ‘ring fence’ space in their communities and will defend the right to occupy it by ‘post code’ designation. Take crumbling inner city communities, who are starved of resources, with people living on the edge, where the daily battle to keep young people off the streets is being lost. Combine this with a volatile, but coping generation, who are fed up of being the target for media sensationalism, the police, and an assortment of corrupt individuals, hell bent on exploiting the crumbling infrastructure, and you have Shadow People. Most of all their stories about people, community, survival, a determination to succeed, and testimonies that must be heard.

Black Leadership:
The latest edition of 'Ebony' magazine carried an article by writer, activist, and prospective congressman candidate Kevin Powell, centring on Black Leadership. On reading it I felt the need to reflect my own views on this on-going and endless debate. Powell addresses the issue of the symbolism of Barack Obama's presidency, and reminds us that in spite of being the first black president, he is in effect the President of the United States. An important and valid statement. I remember the day we watched this historic moment and for the first time exhaled. However, the euphoria was short lived. Not that it wasn't massive as an event, but the need for the black community to move beyond the confines of its oppression is bigger than that of having a black president. Indeed my own observation of life in Baltimore’s inner city raises some significant and searching questions around the issue of black leadership and why is it important? I have seen, interacted with, talked to, and engaged with a significant amount of prominent black individuals. However, no-one individual I met had the credibility and power to unite and galvanise the different sections of the black community.

Leadership for me is a word difficult to pin down, much like the word community. It's a term that means different things to different people. Maybe that's the problem; there is no singular definition of what leadership is, and what qualities leaders possess, in any definitive way. Yet there are countless books, articles, research investigations, conferences, and so on, all designed to create a unified understanding of leadership. Again I have more questions for anyone taking up the position of leadership. In a community that has gang leaders, business leaders, educational leaders, sports leaders, arts leaders, political leaders, and numerous other contestants, why is there such an outcry in both the US and UK for a single individual to lead the masses to a new place? Powell's assertion raises an important question. We have a black leader in the US, but the absence of a race context to the presidency highlights the difficulty of occupying such a position.

A presidency has to address a diverse range of concerns of which race is only a facet. However, a leader that can unite the masses where race becomes a key factor represents a different context and continuum. So therefore, how can one individual unite a community whose needs, difference, and social reality are so varied and complex?
How does or can one individual forge links and empower Baltimore's disaffected, victims of crime, college graduates, parents, business people, faith leaders, the unemployed, veterans, the very young, single mothers, and so on. What is the glue that binds this constituency? And what are the ingredients in the makeup of the glue? Maybe the answer lies within researching and reframing the history that gave rise to individuals who did galvanise the community. Maybe we need to go back and relook at Malcolm, Martin, DuBois, Fanon, Rosa Parks, The Niagara Movement, Negritude, The Harlem Renaissance, and any other area of the hidden story. Maybe it's less about one leader and discovering the leader within all of us.

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Iz:

I’m sitting in the passenger seat watching Ted enter the door of a small apartment. I’m quite nervous as I’m not too clear about what’s going on. All I’ve been told is there’s a young man wanting to get out his gang, and he’s in distress. I pan around trying to repress any anxious feelings that I have, but I keep returning to the White door that Ted has gone through. It’s a bizarre feeling. I know Ted is a few feet away, but his absence makes me feel vulnerable. A few moments later Ted emerges and fills me in on his discussions with the young man inside the apartment. It transpires that this young man has a range of problems and is not coping. A gang member not coping means trouble if it’s not sorted. Towards the end of Ted’s briefing the door opens and out steps “IZ”, a small framed, light skin, African American, in his early 20’s. He is followed by his partner, who has a vexed look on her face. Clearly there is some tension between them. Iz takes a call, paces up and down, then terminates the call abruptly. He’s pissed. Iz jumps into the back seat of Teds car and lets out a scream. He’s been told if he doesn’t find $6000 for owed rent, then he will be evicted. In order to put some distance between himself and the gang, Iz decided a new start was in order. However, no job, qualifications, or experience, means he has no capacity to meet his obligations. What an irony. A gang member wants to turn his life around, but the available means to do so are not on offer to him.

Iz’s obvious distress becomes more intense out of the desperation of his situation. He wants to leave the gang, but if he can’t get money for his rent, he may have to reconsider his position. Outsiders to his situation would say it’s easy. The reality is far from true. Ted tries to calm the situation with seasoned wisdom and care. Iz listens, but the pain of this moment silences any responses he may give. I look at Iz’s puffed up eyes, clenched fists, and body rocking, and felt compelled to talk to him. As was the norm in these situations Ted had to vouch for me, as a way of brokering any conversation I needed to have. Trust is the most important value for gang members. So the sight of a complete stranger like me creates a situation where that trust must be earned. The key to talking to guys like Iz is ‘keeping it real’. Don’t lie, keep your ego locked away, look the person straight in the eyes, and don’t make false promises. So I kept it real. I shared some of my own experiences of facing difficulties, as a way of connecting to his distress.
A short while later, Iz smiles, nods, and begins to open up to me. I discover he has a passion for drawing. I give him a copy of my latest illustrated children’s book, and urge him to change his focus by re-connecting to his passion. For a few minutes Iz is no longer a gang member. He is a young man dreaming of a new future, escaping into the world of his imagination. It’s a breakthrough moment. Ted smiles at me and praises Iz for his interaction with me. The frown lines have gone, Iz looks less stressed, and any thoughts about gang life have disappeared. A call comes through. Iz retreats back to his gang demeanour. Iz touches my fist, exits the car, and ushers Ted into the apartment. I’m alone again. It feels like it’s a long time, even though it’s a matter of minutes. Ted and Iz emerge, embrace each other. It’s time to go. I get out the car and thank Iz for his openness and vulnerability. We touch fists, I walk off. Iz calls me back and asks me for some contact details. I give him a card. We leave. Ted gets a text from Iz. He thanks Ted for introducing me to him. Ted smiles and tells me that my actions have not only assisted Iz, but I have averted a possible street robbery, based on his current situation. I felt good. Reality is you can’t save everyone, but you can bring some relief to a difficult situation. Small steps make a big one.

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New Thoughts:

Being in Baltimore has enabled me to view many aspects of my views, values, and insights in a whole different way. I have become and am now seen as a public intellectual, inasmuch as I occupy two spaces equally but different; community and academia. It feels like waking up in a strange room and things have changed. Many things have changed, not least me. The irony of feeling both liberated and trapped at the same time is a strange feeling, but one that I’m trying to manage. I can’t go back to what I was and I am not yet fully formed in terms of being re-borned in a new form I have felt at times disconnected and dislocated, and wandered around in a liminal space waiting to make some kind of transition into something. Like many people I occasionally hover like a humming bird and at times being frightened to confront things that you have to let go of. In reality I am meeting new people, having new experiences, and have acquired fresh perspectives, not just about crime, but people. Ralph Ellison’s opening statement comes to mind:

'I AM an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who ’ haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fibre and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible; understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination - indeed, everything and everything except me:
Ellison encapsulates how I have felt during a trip that will be dissected, debated over, and at times dismissed as a voyeuristic gaze at another culture. In conversation with a good friend he made a comment about notions of invisibility and referred to this state of being as like a 12th man (Substitute) on a cricket team. I reflected on my own situation and realised how at times I feel like the 12th man. I was told that any new journey would be lonely, transforming, and at times uncomfortable. The desire to be a team player, but being relegated to the bench because your style of play doesn’t suit people is very painful. Flair, individuality, and operating outside the box, are all qualities that scares a team that have been playing the same formation and tactics for the longest while. I do not want to be invisible, but if I continue to settle for second best, compromise myself, or play into other people’s mindset, and then I am destined to sit on the subs bench. I keep coming back to Ellison’s prophetic speech. Why do I feel this way? Maybe I’m invisible to me and need to become more visible. I buy a new book ‘The New Jim Crow – Mass incarceration in the age of colour-blindness’ by Michelle Alexander. An amazing book founded on the premise that not only is race a key factor in criminal justice, but the contexts that led to the enslavement of African American’s has moved into the prison industrial complex. I smile and am grateful for Baltimore’s invisible citizens letting me into their lives. I know why I’m here. More importantly I know who I am.

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**Reality Check:**

Seeing deep poverty up close and personal, meeting and talking with victims of crime, combined with numerous observations of the impact of social neglect on real people’s lives, I am confronted with a troubling feeling. On one hand I desire to be part of a process of social change and transformation, but there is a strong sense of feeling quite powerless to affect the changes I want to see take place. It was at this point I started to reflect on a book by Donna Merten’s called ‘Transformative research and Evaluation.’ She states:

‘The transformative paradigm recognises that serious problems exist in communities despite their resilience in the process of throwing off the shackles of oppression as well as making visible the oppressive structures in society. Researchers working in any type of community can learn from those who are engaged in this struggle, just as we learn from each other through critical examination of the assumptions that have historically guided research studies’

Merten’s point reassures me that research can transcend the boundaries of the academy and locate itself in the process of social change and transformation. It is an isolating place to be, as to do so means limiting the kind of resource opportunities available for conventional approaches to research. Ultimately it is down to each research to take a position in relation to their core values, passion, and vision for the work they’re doing. Baltimore has more than confronted me with that reality. I am now going to attempt to explain my reasons for taking this position: For most of my working and professional life I have worked with many social groups, committed to enabling those with silent and invisible voices to be seen and heard. It has been a difficult journey at times, leading to many moments of self-doubt, trepidation, and emptiness. The contrast at times has been empowering, motivating, and energising.
However, the continuing challenge to play a role in enabling black men to find their own voices is an on-going battle. In spite of being a practitioner of many years, and now venturing into the world of academia, via a PhD, I still have difficulties in raising the profile of the work I do. Mainly because the story of black men has been traditionally told by others. By moving away from this position has at times posed a threat to much of the dominant theories and practices. Baltimore has reaffirmed my commitment to continuing this struggle (and it is a struggle) as there are very few people committed to engaging with that section of the black community that has been written off and are not easy to access. It is not an easy type of work nor is it driven by ego.

It is something more fundamental. The need for the community to be a place where black men go to prison less, are less mentally ill, and can restore their well-being back to some kind of balance. Many black men within the UK and US are over represented amongst the prison population, are suspended and expelled from school more than their white counterparts, gang affiliation amongst many young black men is on the increase, black on black violence through guns is growing, and many young black men are struggling to achieve positive masculine development in relation to fatherhood. Equally as important is the recognition that there are many successful black men who have excelled in their chosen careers and professions, who are hard working, haven’t been in trouble with the law, and are taking care of their families. Despite the increase in social mobility, earnings, and opportunities for black men in the UK and US, it is questionable whether they are more socially acceptable. The rise in extreme right wing activity, the absence of a positive black male presence within the UK and US media landscape, and a social infrastructure that addresses itself more to black men as a problem, as opposed to an asset. In investigating the current social positioning of black men within a UK and US context, it is important to identify key factors that both unite and divide black men.

It is this questioning that has led me to believe that black men in the UK and US are still being moved away from achieving a meaningful and productive life. I am of the opinion that living within a society that defines itself through a mono-cultural ideology, many black men have constructed a self-concept and masculine identity more as a coping strategy built more on survival than designing a template for holistic living. It is my view that this coping strategy sets up the possibility for the development of a false consciousness that is maintained through fears, pressure, and intimidation by social structures, who demand loyalty, restricting any questioning of its values. For black men in the UK and US to gain more ground and have a bigger stake in the wealth of the country, there needs to be a re-framing of the current world view that many of us hold. Things are further complicated by an institutional response to black needs that uses ‘Street Level Bureaucracy’ as the conduit for handling the social aspirations of black men. This systematic approach to public policy delivery operates very effectively by stifling black self-determination, independence, and ultimately liberation from a system that serves its own needs. The net result is a black community that becomes trapped, disillusioned, powerless and ultimately controlled.
It is easy to fall into a rhetorical position about who has the best theory, best position, most coherent argument, and numerous other postures that have little validity or credibility with a gunshot victim, families living in poverty, or countless individuals who have no voice in how their communities are maintained where each member feels connected and takes ownership for making the environment a great place to reside. I started the journey in Baltimore unaware of the eventual impact of the trip. I’ve almost concluded my sojourn with a renewed sense of purpose and a desire to use my skills and expertise for the greater good. Not only am I comfortable with that decision, but I feel it’s is the right thing to do.
The Summary
1. **Fatherhood**

The impact of father hunger and deficit is an epidemic in Inner city Baltimore and has created a void with the overall life of the inner city itself. The need for a father and to experience positive fathering is on an epidemic scale. The impact of this area of young black men’s lives cannot be underestimated or ignored. Once again my own research would suggest that many of those young black men have ‘opted out’ from wanting to address their feelings on this issue, and find solace in their crew and extended peer group. South African criminologist and journalist Don Pinnock argues:

> … gangs provide more emotional support than the youths' often-dysfunctional families. But there's another, even more important, reason for the existence of gangs. In the history of all of our cultures, and in cultures people call 'primitive' today, adolescent boys face ordeals and trials that test their manhood and courage. In our urban cultures, which have lost ancient roots through migration, poverty or dilution young people continue to have (and act on) the same needs. Where ritual is absent it is created. (Pinnock 2003)

Pinnock highlights that the collapse of the contemporary families can give rise to a different type of family, namely the gang. Another common feature of father deficit and hunger is the issue of ‘being a man’. Talking to some young black men who are angry at their father’s absence, it is evident that many of them left the relationship and handed over the responsibility for being ‘the man of the house’ to his son, who was ill equipped to deal with such a role. However, the need to protect mum and show family leadership has placed many young black men in a role that at times brings them into conflict with mum’s new partner. This makes matters worse as it compounds the isolation of young black men who cannot actualize their own sense of masculine identity.

The young black man, who loves his absent father, may choose to defend his father’s honour. The result is more chaos, confusion, and possible conflict. Cultural commentator and feminist, bell hooks also argues that much is written about black men by black men, but little is written about “how black men might create new and different self-concepts”. hooks takes the position that young black men themselves must take a stronger position on critical thinking to begin the process of recovery from the huge deficit created by an oppressive history. If young black men cannot develop a positive self-concept it is questionable whether they can maintain a focus that will enable them to **desist** from crime, anti-social behavior, or risky lifestyles. The pressure brought about by not having **time to heal** or **headspace to think** for many young black men creates the level of internal distress resulting in projected anger, rage, and social conflict.
Hence the propensity to continue the cycle of masculine decline that ends up in prison, psychiatric wards, pupil referral units, etc, that in turn robs generations of younger black men of brothers, fathers, uncles, and significant elders. As the lack of communication from many black men becomes acute, the knock on effect assists in eroding notions of a ‘healthy community’. With unprecedented levels of personal violence on the increase; the extended family hurtling towards extinction; elders wisdom in short supply; relationships struggling to stay afloat; it is plain to see how many young black men returning back to the community from prison become institutionalised casualties who are walking around in a ‘self-destruct mode’. This moves the outcome away from a ‘Criminal justice issue’ into the realms of what could best be described as a wider ‘Public health epidemic’. When one analyses the contemporary journey of black men in prison as fathers and sons, words such as absent, negative, deadbeat, useless, and so on recur and manifest themselves in a generation of young black men who suffer a growing legacy of ‘father deficit’ that can and does lead to those same young men searching for replacement father’s within the confines of ‘gang culture’.

2. **Criminal as victim**

In inner city Baltimore there is a hidden layer of criminal justice casualties; young men who have desisted from a life of crime, but have themselves become victims of crime. Attempts to leave the gang, beating the court case by informing on others, and community justice in the form of revenge creates more victims. These victims have no sympathy from society or the community. Their lives are ruled by fear, governed by the code of the streets, and have little pathway to a new life.

3. **Poverty that forces you back into crime**

Having no money to live on, little or no healthcare insurance, limited employment and educational opportunities is forcing many young men back to the ‘corners’ as a way surviving and restoring lost masculine pride and status. The prospect of having nothing creates the lack of motivation to return back to a life of law abiding activity. This position results in forcing individuals back to the ‘corners’ as a way surviving and restoring lost pride and status.

4. **Biography**

The need to access the stories of the real lived experiences of inner city people living in Baltimore is vital in terms of understanding what needs they have, and how solutions can be found to the problems they face. Little Melvin’s history of criminality and ultimate desistance has relevance for scholars looking at desistance. However, Melvin lives in the Inner city where many researchers fear to tread. This poses a dilemma for an important area of investigation. The need for capturing these important narratives are crucial here. Shows like ‘The Wire’, ‘The Soprano’s’, CSI, and so on, may be realistic but do little in terms of giving insight to the wider community about crime and it’s orientation.
5. **Access to constituency**

Researching in a place like Baltimore’s inner city requires a reframing of the ethical considerations required when undertaking an investigation that requires high risk. Ethics are the bedrock of academic research. An important and necessary process of selection of methods to be used in accessing constituents. Thus ensuring objectification in the process. In most cases it requires negotiating access, brokering relationships, and finding formats that will satisfy both the commissioning agency as well as the subjects of the inquiry. In places like Baltimore’s inner city, ethical considerations are no less important, but different. The element of risk has to be carefully balanced against the need to undertake the work required. Gaining access at times is at the discretion of criminals, gang members, or go betweens who broker the access. It is important that any researcher undertaking work in a difficult environment make appropriate choices and selections without compromising the outcomes. It is also important to both include and exclude any outcomes, but not to avoid engaging in these hostile environments on account of protocols that at time should be questioned and challenged.

6. **Secondary Victimisation**

Many young people are impacted by childhood neglect, abuse, and violence have major psychological issues that are not being addressed. The lack of support for these *secondary victims* in itself generates more victims, who themselves become perpetrators of acts of violence and abuse. These individuals have no access to public funds for therapy or counselling. They walk around the community like the walking dead and are literally dying a day at a time. Packed into a densely populated and over policed community, these individuals pass unnoticed and blend in well as another veneer of urban decay. *Where is the morality in this situation? How can it be justified? How is it maintained?* If we addressed this question, maybe we would have to do something about it as a society.

7. **Faith based conversion** - (Finding a new father – God)

The need for re-connecting to the Spirit becomes a fundamental need for many that is not couched in religious dogma and rhetoric. Blighted by slavery, denied access, racism, and still being ravaged by a system that over incarcerates, African American men are searching for a new identity that will rid them of the pain of socio-historical neglect and provide some much needed healing. Baltimore’s inner city people, read the Bible and Koran, find comfort in the arts, retreat inside the beats of music, and push for Spiritual guidance. It is a strong motivating force for staying out of trouble and transforming one’s life into new meaning and purpose as a way of transcending the burden of acute and on-going pain. There are strong faith community inputs into the lives of many, but for those who lose their faith, the American Dream can become a nightmare.
8. **Mentor as enabling a rite of passage – Individuals who can break it down**

The development of a holistic space and dialogue where academics, strategic players, and community can come together is badly needed in Baltimore’s inner city communities. Too many young people in Baltimore are struggling to cope within the confines of the urban environment. My experience taught me that there is a need for anyone wanting to engage those young people to understand the practicalities of developing **credibility**. Many of the young people I encountered would not give you access to them unless you could demonstrate a clear understanding of where they were at, without judgement. The stories I would hear of young people being subjected to **police brutality, violence in the community, disruptive home lives, father absence due to incarceration, death, or drugs, assuming Family responsibilities, gang culture, and numerous other aspects of inner city living**, at times painted a bleak picture. These young people wanted answers, solutions, and strategies for managing those situations, not circular conversations, or voyeurism. What they needed was individual’s who ‘break it down’ and guide them to a new place.

9. **Desistance**

The term ‘desistance’ is used in relation to understanding why and how former offenders avoid continued involvement in criminal behaviour. Without a clear understanding of the role race plays in the cessation of criminal activity for black men, any understanding of desistance could be both flawed and incomplete. Within criminological theorizing much is written about why black men commit crime and it’s relation to high rates of incarceration of black men both in the UK and US. However, little is known about black men and their **cessation or desistance** from criminal activity. Seldom do theorists engage in a discussion that looks at whether black men’s struggle to desist from involvement crime and disorder, is rooted within a socio-historical context. The acknowledged impact of racism on the lives of young black men that pushes them towards criminal lifestyles, highlights that developing a positive approach to transcending racism and its impact could play a significant role in desisting from criminal behaviour. It is also important for black men to have a sense of who they are, away from the history of their oppression. Author Dan McAdams suggests ‘that stories represents critical scene and turning points in our lives, and that the ‘life story ‘is a joint product of person and environment. In a sense the two write the story together.’ McAdam’s presents a plausible argument that suggests storytelling can provide a framework that identities desistance as a journey. Therefore it could be argued that the understanding of the destination arrived, must be understood in term of the journey travelled.

10 **Community Businesses** - Raising the profile and development of community businesses within black communities is vital to increase the visibility of those services in the wider social economy. Baltimore has many problems that are being addressed by strategic agencies, academic institutions, and communities. However, the disconnect between them means at times the needs of the community can be rendered invisible or struggle to become visible in the wider social economy.
Therefore, there is a need to ensure that responses to community need are placed within a business model to create the possibility for self-determined actions, as well as reducing the systemic dependency that occurs all too often. The diversity of business responses to community need demonstrated innovation, flair, and resilience. Street vendors, second hand furniture stores, complimentary educational programmes, arts based interventions, and numerous other activities highlighted what can be done to maintain and sustain community life where there is no Government support.
The Gallery
The accommodation
Me at the Urban Leadership Institute

David Miller (CEO - Urban Leadership Institute)
Baltimore police cars

Barnes and Noble Book store and Hard Rock Café
Me outside Barnes and Noble Book store and Hard Rock Café
Me outside the courthouse

Me with young people at the East Baltimore Drug free coalition meeting
Me with Jill Williams PA at Johns Hopkins University

Me, Melvin Williams, and Dr Phil Leaf
Me and Ted Sutton

Community Event in central Baltimore
Melvin Williams AKA Little Melvin

Downtown Baltimore – Inner Harbour
Harbour Police

Johns Hopkins Children Centre
Me and David Miller

Me at the Reginald F Lewis – African American History Museum
Murder Victim Shrine

The courthouse
The Recommendations
1. **Feedback:**
   To organise a series of feedback seminars reporting on my trip around the following issues:
   - The impact of father hunger/deficit in Baltimore and its implications for UK society.
   - Barriers to desistance from crime for young black men
   - Researching in high risk situations

2. **The future:**
   - To build on the relationship with Johns Hopkins University
   - To develop international partnership working around the issues of fatherlessness, issues of fatherlessness, father deficit/hunger, and its impact on communities.
   - To share any findings with colleagues, vested interests, partners, and policy makers to establish the evidence base for addressing relevant policy concerns associated with the issues of fatherlessness, father deficit/hunger, and its impact on communities.

3. **Product development**
   To market and promote the following products:

   **Mum, Dad, and Me - Storytelling for parents - Toolkit**
   Mum, Dad, and Me: Storytelling for Parents - Toolkit is aimed at parents who want to use storytelling or story making as a starting point for improving communication with their children. It will also provide parents with some complimentary tools when addressing some of the challenging issues that can arise when parenting today’s generation.

   **Mum, Dad, and Me - Storytelling for parents - Workshop**
   Storytelling for parents - Workshop is an interactive and participatory experience designed to empower and assist parents in using the techniques outlined in Mum, Dad, and Me: Storytelling for Parents - Toolkit.

   **To Dad - Lament for my father**
   Lament for my father is an epic poem written for my absent father, designed to enable fathers to reflect on their own relationship with their own father. It is also a template for fathers wanting to write their own poetic autobiography that can be used as a legacy for their own children.
The Conclusion
Being in Baltimore has changed many things for me. I have felt at times disconnected and dislocated, and wandered around in a liminal space waiting to make some kind of transition into something. Like many people I occasionally hover like a humming bird and at times being frightened to confront things that you have to let go of. In reality I am meeting new people, having new experiences, and have acquired fresh perspectives, not just about crime, but people. Ralph Ellison’s opening statement comes to mind. ‘I AM an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who ’ haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fibre and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible; understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination - indeed, everything and everything except me:

Ellison encapsulates how I have felt during a trip that will be dissected, debated over, and at times dismissed as a voyeuristic gaze at another culture. In conversation with a good friend he made a comment about notions of invisibility and referred to this state of being as like a 12th man (Substitute) on a cricket team. I reflected on my own situation and realise how at times I feel like the 12th man. I was told that any new journey would be lonely, transforming, and at times uncomfortable. The desire to be a team player, but being relegated to the bench because your style of play doesn’t suit people is very painful. Flair, individuality, and operating outside the box, are all qualities that scares a team that have been playing the same formation and tactics for the longest while. I do not want to be invisible, but if I continue to settle for second best, compromise myself, or play into other people’s mindset, and then I am destined to sit on the subs bench. I keep coming back to Ellison’s prophetic speech. Why do I feel this way? Maybe I’m invisible to me and need to become more visible. I buy a new book ‘The New Jim Crow – Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness’ by Michelle Alexander. An amazing book founded on the premise that not only is race a key factor in criminal justice, but the contexts that led to the enslavement of African American’s has moved into the prison industrial complex. I smile and am grateful for Baltimore’s invisible citizens letting me into their lives. I know why I’m here. More importantly I know who I am.

Martin Glynn (Sept 2010)
Appendices
Profile - Martin Glynn
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Martin is a criminologist with over 25 year’s experience of working in prisons and schools. He has a Cert.Ed. a Masters degree in criminal justice policy and practice, and is currently doing his PHD at Birmingham City University (The Sankofa Paradigm – Towards a Critical Race Theory of Desistance). Martin is also currently a visiting lecturer at Birmingham City University teaching ‘Representation of Crime in Film and Television’ to undergraduates studying criminal justice policy and practice.

Martin has fed into the Home Office Select Committee report ‘Overrepresentation of young black people in the criminal Justice System’ (Home Office 2006) and the recent Centre for Social Justice Report on Gang Culture in the UK (CSJ 2009). In 2008 Martin took part in a unique social experiment Banged Up for Channel Five fronted by the former Home Secretary the Rt. Hon David Blunkett MP. Ten teenage boys, aged 16-17, on their way to a life of crime came face to face with ten reformed, hardened criminals who offered an in-your-face, no-holds-barred account of life inside (Broadcast July 2008). Martin has recently published several children’s books:

- **“The Endz ” (2009)** published by ACAF (Nottingham) looks at the issue associated with black men and the stigma associated with Mental Health
- **“I believe I can fly ” (2010)** published by OSCAR (Nottingham) looks at the issue of a young girls battle to come to terms with having sickle cell, whilst nursing a dream to become part of the school dance crew.
- **“TJ ”s dreams ” (2010)** published by Sankofa Associates (Birmingham) is a poetic journey of a young boy who escapes into the world of his dreams.

- In 2007 Martin was awarded a grant from the Arts Council of England to adapt his book **Blood Bond** into a full length stage play.
From inner-city Britain to Baltimore’s mean streets

Black scholar’s journey takes him to the home of The Wire to study ‘desistance’. John Morgan writes

As fans of cult US television series The Wire will know, Baltimore is a city with problems. The series focused unflinchingly on racial divisions, corruption, gang- and drug-related violence and the effects of social deprivation on every level of society.

Now a British lecturer is travelling to Maryland to study solutions to crime in the city as part of his PhD.

Martin Glynn, a criminologist at Birmingham City University, is beginning a thesis that will consider the testimonies of black male offenders who have turned away from crime.

Mr Glynn joined the academy late in life – he is beginning his PhD in his fifties after gaining a master’s degree, despite missing out on undergraduate study.

He has won a Winston Churchill International Travel Fellowship, allowing him to travel to Baltimore on the East Coast of the US for two months. He will spend time at both the Johns Hopkins University and the Urban Leadership Institute.

He said Baltimore was a draw for two reasons: the strong research in his subject area conducted by Johns Hopkins, and the fact that the city is the setting for The Wire, whose characters include teenagers drawn into dealing drugs, the police officers whose job it is to deal with them, and the city politicians who set the agenda on crime.

Mr Glynn said: “The Wire is put forward as one of the best examples of cultural criminology, where we see the collusion of the state in generating aspects of crime.

“I wanted to go to the community where it is filmed, because there are a lot of very good programmes that have a resonance with what I’m investigating.”

Mr Glynn argued that his thesis will explore an area traditionally ignored by criminology.

"I’m developing what is called a critical race theory of ‘desistance’ [the process of ceasing and desisting from offending] for black British men,” he explained.

Criminology “is not very good at discussing race”, and desistance is an even greater blind spot for the discipline, he added.

Mr Glynn, who described himself as coming from an “inner-city” background in Nottingham, said that at first he was wary about becoming an academic.

“To leave that behind to go into this middle-class, white male environment created what’s referred to as ‘double-consciousness’,” he said. “When I first started, academics were white people who came to interview you after a riot.”

But he added that his views had been challenged at Birmingham City and that he had found “love and support” there.

Mr Glynn said his research on desistance would be of use in areas such as the education system, where black boys are more likely to be suspended or excluded from school than their white counterparts.

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Martin to probe link between dads and crime in U.S. study

By Amy Bowen
News reporter

AN ACADEMIC from Birmingham City University has become the only person in the West Midlands to receive a prestigious Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship.

Martin Glynn, a criminologist, will use the grant from the Fellowship to travel to Baltimore in the United States this summer to examine the impact of fatherlessness in antisocial behaviour.

“My current work in criminology has identified fatherlessness, father hunger and father deficit as some key indicators and contributory factors, motivating some young men to seek and find solace in gangs, live risky lifestyles, and engage in antisocial behaviour,” Martin explained.

“I will study these ideas further when I travel to the States and spend time at John Hopkins University and the Urban Leadership Institute in Baltimore.

“I will be looking at issues related to community violence and crime among young black men, as well as comparing and contrasting urban street crime violence between the United Kingdom and Baltimore.”

Martin’s research will help in understanding issues affecting young black men in the region as well as inform his current PhD: The Sankofa Paradigm – Towards a Critical Race Theory of Desistance.

The Winston Churchill Trust has been awarding the Travelling Fellowship grants since 1958 to enable Fellows to carry out projects overseas.

For further information, visit www.wcmt.org.uk.