

# #GirlsAndGangs

**Girls, gangs and their abusive relationships**

Samantha Jury-Dada  
2018 Churchill Fellow

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## About the author



Samantha Jury-Dada is a 2018 Churchill Fellow and currently lives in Manchester. She has a BSc in Social Policy with Government from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Samantha's previous work includes being Report Editor of '*Stopping Distance: making stop and search work for London*' a policy paper written by Baroness Doreen Lawrence and Dame Tessa Jowell. In 2015 she conducted research on the efficacy of police rape prevention campaigns.

She currently works for iMPOWER, a public sector consultancy. Her previous roles include working for SafeLives the national domestic abuse charity and in the Houses of Parliament as a Parliamentary Assistant to an MP. She also served as an elected Councillor in the London Borough of Southwark from 2016 – 2018, during this time she was also a school governor for a Central London secondary school and sixth form.

Twitter: [@SJuryDada](https://twitter.com/SJuryDada)

Website: [www.girlsandgangs.uk](http://www.girlsandgangs.uk)

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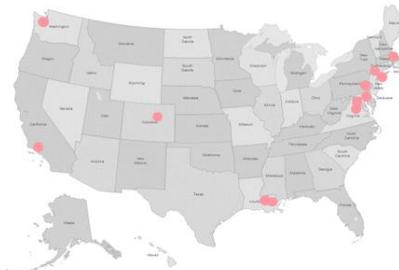
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# Section 1: Executive Summary

Rarely a day goes by in the UK without the news cycle featuring at least one heart-breaking story of a young person suffering the consequence of gang violence in our major cities. Often, the victims are young boys and the weapon of choice is nearly always a knife. **Lost in the debate is the fact that most the strategies put forward are gendered and targeted at young males. The consideration of young women and girls associated with these men is often secondary for decision makers.** By ignoring them, they remain invisible to authorities and in turn services are not being commissioned to support them. This makes it easier for those who are exploiting them.

This Fellowship, awarded by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, resulted in five weeks of travelling across the USA to New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington DC, North Virginia and New Orleans. I met with NGOs, City Governments and criminal justice professionals. The project primarily looked at how criminal justice professionals interact with these women, as an acknowledgement that this is the area where there is most opportunity for change.



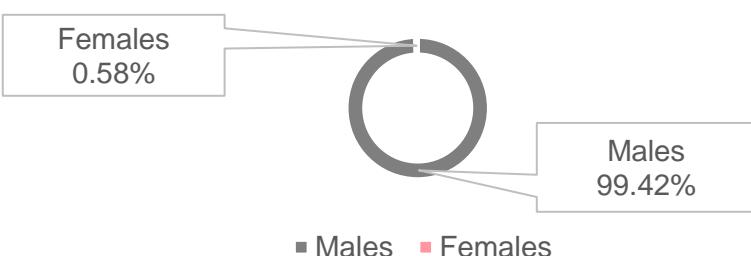
**'They think they deserve it'**

## Identifying women and girls through the criminal justice system

The women and girls associated with gang members are invisible to services. **Firstly, because they do not want to be seen. Secondly, because of police culture.** There is a culture in the police to not acknowledge women and girls or their risk. This is evident in the USA and in the UK. This is serious **as intervention services are being commissioned based on flawed data** (see graph below). Los Angeles have at least 40% of their gang intervention and prevention services attended by females, demonstrating best practice on effectively targeting women and girls.

**'She is embarrassed that she is abused and doubly embarrassed because he is a gang member...then she becomes complicit in his crimes'**

London Metropolitan Police Gang Matrix



## Working with women and girls affected by gangs

These young women do not consider themselves victims and therefore will not engage with services that are marketed as generalist 'victim support' services. Additionally, victims of domestic abuse whose perpetrator is a gang member will also face consequences for cooperating with authorities not only from their partner, but the gang. The fear that domestic abuse victims have about surveillance and stalking is further heightened when the perpetrator is in a gang. It feels like they have 'eyes everywhere'. These young women also do not fit the stereotype of the 'ideal victim'. They are uncooperative, may have criminal records and have additional barriers to accessing support if they are an ethnic minority.

**'Whole communities are traumatised by the impact of violence'**

**'She is the victim out there that nobody cares about'**

### **Understanding the context of relationships between girls and gang members**

While not universally true that young men and boys who are involved with gangs will be abusive in their relationships, the trauma they have experienced makes it more likely. Their behaviour in a relationship may mimic the toxic relationship he has with fellow gang members. The girls may have also had a difficult upbringing. Therefore, **they share significant trauma backgrounds. This combination can result in an intense and violent relationship.** These hard to reach women responded to 'self-love', self-esteem building workshops rather than traditional victim support services.

**'These are my consequences'**

### **Techniques deployed to tackle gender-based violence associated with gang violence:**

- **Credible messengers** who can relate to young people because they have lived experience, understand the choices facing that young person and look and speak like them. They are consciously recruited by the police and charities in the USA.
- **Female outreach staff.** If a gang intervention service is only male, for young women and girls these services have staff that look and sound like those who have exposed them to violence. This can alienate a whole cohort of vulnerable people from accessing support.
- **Meeting the other needs of the young person before attempting gang exit.** A multi-agency response which acknowledges that young people need to have health, education, employment and household issues resolved before they can attempt to put their life back on track.

### **Key Recommendations**

Police need to tackle the culture that results in women and girls associated with gangs not being acknowledged. A **gender audit** of police gang databases should be undertaken to assess whether the practice is widespread.

There should be an effort to **coordinate charities** in the UK that offer support to girls affected by gangs.

Those working on the frontline with young people affected by gang violence should use a **trauma informed approach**. They should also undertake training on the dynamics of power and control and the consequences of domestic abuse.

Organisations that deliver frontline services must make an active effort to recruit outreach staff from the communities that they are working in and have **female frontline workers**.

Local authorities should produce **up to date directories of commissioned services**, for use by frontline staff. So staff are aware of the resources available to them to help young women and girls.

**Local and national politicians should take responsibility for coordinating community leaders and frontline services** to tackle issues associated with gangs, including gender-based violence.

There is no single solution to solve the issues facing girls associated with gangs but acknowledging that they exist is the first step. Stakeholders must work collaboratively to '*give neighbourhoods the opportunity to reclaim their community*'.

## Section 2: Context

### 2.1 Introduction

Rarely a day goes by in the UK without the news cycle featuring at least one heart-breaking story of a young person suffering the consequence of gang violence in our major cities. Often, the victims are young boys and the weapon of choice is nearly always a knife. As politicians, policy makers and professionals debate how to tackle the issue of youth violence, the strategies put forward are gendered and targeted at young males. The consideration of young women and girls associated with these men is often secondary for decision makers. Yet, the harm they experience including sexual abuse, domestic violence and exploitation are severe. By ignoring these young women and girls, they are invisible to services that need to be supporting them and make it easier for those who exploit them.

Most juvenile offenders in the UK are male (83%, Youth Justice Board 2017), so focusing on this population makes sense, especially with budget pressures in the public sector. However, focusing policing on the male population with tools such as stop and search means that females are seen to be able to ‘fly under the radar’. This is already a challenge for children’s services, as we have seen a rise in girls being used by gangs in county lines activity, with 90% of County Lines gangs using girls (Whittaker et al, 2018).

Both girls and boys are vulnerable to child sexual exploitation. However, girls are more likely to be victims than boys. Since the exposure of child sex trafficking rings in England, there has been a sustained effort to tackle forms of child sexual exploitation. A common theme between girls who are being exploited sexually and those being used by gangs, is an initial dysfunctional relationship.

Young women and girls play a varied role in gangs in the UK, in some they are merely girlfriends tasked with hiding weapons, storing drugs and providing support to the gang. In others, girls are active members on par with the males in the gang. This Fellowship was primarily focused on the former. However, what soon became clear was these young women and girls do not always neatly fit into these two categories. Indeed, they can be both victims and perpetrators, which makes supporting them even more challenging for services that want users to be one or the other.

There is a surprising lack of public research on young women and girls associated with gangs and their abusive relationships. In light of young people experiencing the highest rates of domestic abuse of any age group (SafeLives, 2017), this is surprising. Control and coercion are key to gang culture, yet the relationships that these young men are having with their girlfriends or intimate partners have not been analysed.

Gang intervention programmes are often commissioned based on a number of different outcomes, but the primary objective is gang exit. However, without working on and monitoring the reduction of other abusive behaviours, although these young men and boys may no longer be in a gang by the end of the programme, they may still be abusing their partners.

Organisations visited during the Fellowship, used a trauma informed approach. This approach recognises that young people involved in crime are likely to have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as domestic abuse. By working with young people and acknowledging the adverse experiences they may have had, these programmes hope to prevent them returning into the criminal justice system on other violent offences.

If we only measure the success of programmes based on gang activity and do not work with young people on their experiences and exposure to violence, these young people could end up back in the criminal justice system as adults.

The aims of this Fellowship were to:

- Understand the role that young women and girls play in gangs
- Learn best practice on how to identify young women and girls associated with gangs
- Find good examples of gang intervention work aimed at young women and girls (under the age of 25 years old)
- Find examples of gang intervention programmes that work with men and boys on healthy attitudes towards women

## 2.2 USA comparison

In the UK, if you ask the average person to name a gang they are likely to refer to USA based gangs such as the Bloods or Crips, or even MS-13. If you ask them to name a UK based gang, most would struggle.

This Fellowship learned from gang intervention programmes who had similar gang contexts the UK. Gangs who have little notoriety outside of the areas they are based, who may have symbols or signs to identify one another but not on the level of international gangs that dominate the headlines in the USA. According to the professionals working in the sector that I met with, cities such as Philadelphia, Baltimore and New Orleans have never had a real presence of the major national gangs, instead street gangs based on zip codes or family affiliation dominate areas.

Understanding the local context is crucial to tackling gender-based violence associated with gangs. In North Virginia, they have the international gang MS-13 which is associated with immigrants from El Salvador. We know that women from immigrant communities are less likely to report their abuse (End Violence Against Women Coalition, 2018) and in their situation reporting their abuse not only could they expose their communities to the police and immigration officials, but they could face retribution from the gang. These are not the same vulnerabilities of African American women in Baltimore, but they have their own set of issues which makes it difficult to report. Therefore, to police gangs and associated violence different techniques are required for different contexts.

## 2.3 Methodology

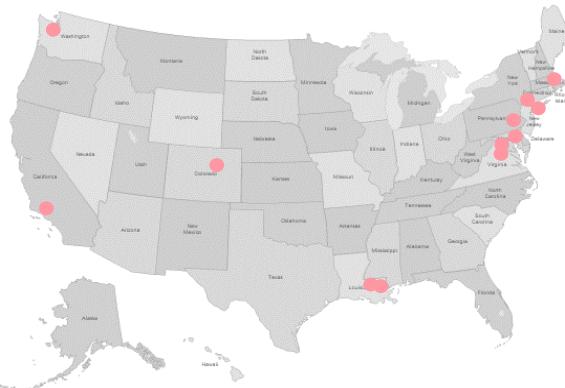
The Fellowship comprised a five week visit to the USA to New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington DC, North Virginia and New Orleans.

To supplement learning, there were also telephone conferences with representatives from organisations and government agencies that worked in cities across the USA (full list of organisations in Appendix A). This approach allowed me to get a thorough understanding of how to tackle gang activity and associated gender-based violence especially when faced with varied demographics and different gang cultures.

To truly understand the context within which organisation were working with families and young people involved in crime, I observed three juvenile cases, visited a juvenile justice services centre and met with legal professionals on both sides of the court. It is important to note that there is a disparity between child protective services and the criminal justice system in the USA and the UK, even within one state there are differing practices and obligations.

While there, I also learned a lot about gang intervention work more generally and the impact of gangs and violence on the community. Much of this learning has been included in this report, as there were techniques and practices that would benefit those working with women and girls too.

This Fellowship has purposefully focused on girls associated with gangs who are in heterosexual relationships. However, further work should be done to understand the role of those who are LGBT and associated with gangs.



## Section 3: Identifying young women and girls through the criminal justice system

**'Why don't we see these girls?'**

Judge Videtta A. Brown

### 3.1 Police identification of girls and women associated with gangs

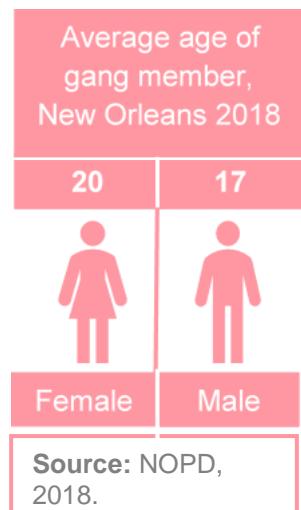
In advance of the visit to New Orleans, the police looked through their gang database and ran analysis on the cohort of people on their system. They found that the average age of a male on the system was 17 years old, whereas the average age for a female was 20.

This reflects an issue with identifying women and girls. Officers hypothesised that in the past they may have stopped a car and thought that the female 'was just a girlfriend' and therefore did not warrant official acknowledgement and recording.

This is an issue particularly in the USA, where access to services is predominantly through the criminal justice system. But in the context of 9 years of austerity, this is becoming truer of the UK.

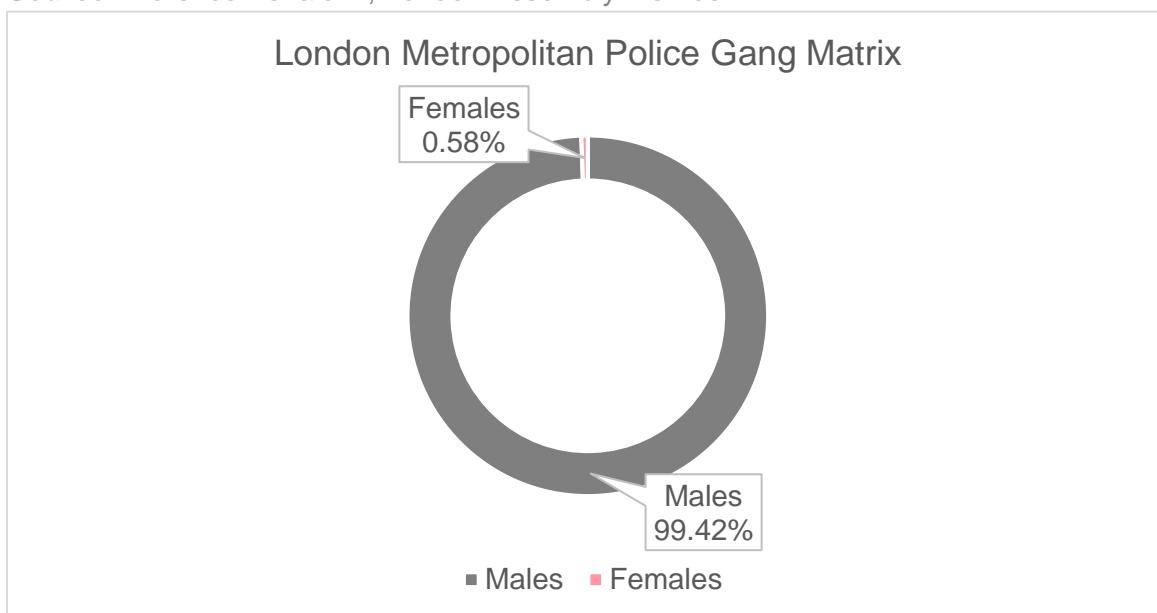
Police and Crime Commissioners are elected across England and Wales and they have the authority and budgets to commission services for victims of crime but also intervention and prevention services. As local authorities face continuing budget cuts and higher costs associated with adult social care and children's services, programmes in Early Help and prevention are facing the cut. Therefore, we are steadily heading toward a system where young people get help via the criminal justice system. However, women and girls are not being identified, then services will not be commissioned to support them.

The London Metropolitan police have over 3,000 people registered on their gang database. Yet of these, only 18 are women. The Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime (MOPAC) is the commissioning arm of the force, yet the data being used to make funding decisions suggests less than 1% of those involved or associated with gangs are female. This simply cannot be the case when we know that 90% of County Lines gangs are using females (Whittaker et al, 2018). It suggests that the Metropolitan police has the same issues with recognising women and girls as the New Orleans Police Department did.



**Graph 1:** Data captured from the Metropolitan Police Gang Matrix, December 2018

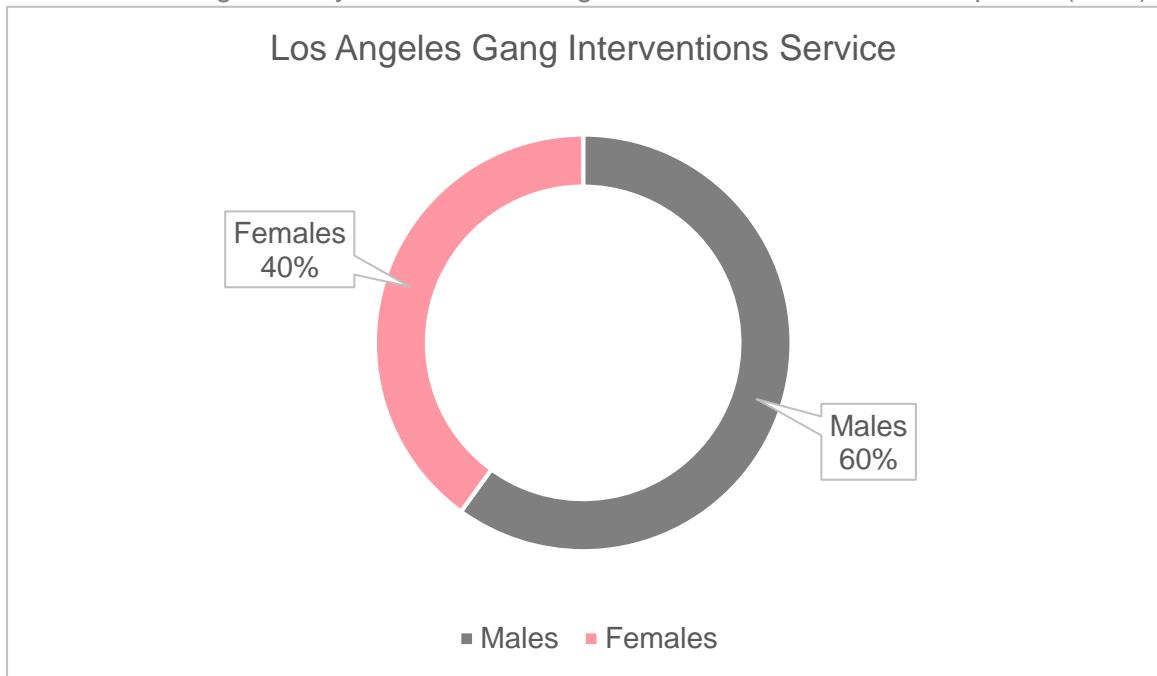
**Source:** Florence Eshalomi, London Assembly Member



But it does not have to be this way. The Director of the Gang Reduction and Youth Development for the Los Angeles Mayor's Office, shared data that demonstrated the gender split in their intervention and prevention services, both of which were 40% and above. This demonstrated a much better record at proactively working with young women and girls. There are differences in gang culture, population and demographics but they are working hard in communities to engage young women and girls to participate in their programmes.

**Graph 2:** Los Angeles Gang Reduction and Youth Development Intervention Service gender split

**Source:** Los Angeles Mayor's Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (2018)



## 3.2 Prosecuting gang members

Another way young women and girls can be identified is through the prosecution of their partners, brothers or friends. The police often collect a large body of evidence during investigations into gang members, not all of which will be used in court. The evidence found through techniques such as mobile data extraction could expose an abusive relationship between a gang member and his partner(s), as the contents of messages and images from the phone are downloaded. However, as this is not something that the police or prosecutors are looking for it is rarely used for this purpose.

In the USA, one prosecutor's office demonstrated the capability of a programme that they use to decrypt phones. The programme allows them to gather data including messages, photographs and GPS information. In one example, the analyst used the application to gather information for a stalking case, but then discovered further criminal offences that were unrelated to the original case. The potential new charges were then passed to another team for further investigation.

If the analyst was able to use their judgement to explore other criminal activity, I wondered what the possibilities would be for using this programme to expose abusive, violent and controlling behaviour that may be perpetrated against gang members' girlfriends.

Training for police across the UK on how to identify abusive behaviours is mixed, with each police force commissioning different organisations to deliver training for frontline and call centre staff. There are different levels of training offered, with some police not receiving refresher training to reinforce their learning. For this type of technology to work in domestic abuse situations with gang members police would have to understand the dynamic of power and control in an abusive relationship and be looking out for it when tackling gang related violence. This is further complicated by the fact that many of the women and girls would not consider themselves victims and thus would be uncooperative.

## 3.3 Recommendations for identifying women and girls through the criminal justice system

**R1. Police need to tackle the culture that results in women and girls associated with gangs not being acknowledged.**

**R2. A gender audit of police gang databases** should be undertaken to assess whether the practice is widespread.

**R3. Police should undertake regular and comprehensive domestic abuse training,** to understand the dynamics of power and control in relationships.

## Section 4: Working with girls involved with gang members

*'She is the victim out there that nobody cares about'*

### 4.1 Cooperation

Those that work in the criminal justice or domestic abuse sector know that often the police are called by the victim, a concerned family member, friend or neighbour but cooperation is not guaranteed.

Non-cooperation is due to several factors. Firstly, for girls involved with gang members, they often do not describe themselves as victims and therefore are not cooperative with services that want to identify them as such. This is often due to a rejection of the ‘victimhood narrative’ which they do not identify with.

Additionally, services are sometimes offered on the condition that they share information about the gang. This approach misjudges the persons willingness to get support against the fear of gang reprisals for speaking with the authorities.

Judge Videtta A. Brown, author of ‘Gang Member Perpetrated Domestic Violence: A New Conversation’ (2007). Spoke about her experiences in Baltimore with witness intimidation of women who have been cooperative with the police and the consequences for them and their families. Those who have worked in domestic abuse will be familiar with the all-consuming fear that victims experience due to their belief that their abuser is able to see everything they do, who they speak to and where they go. Often, this manipulation is a key tool for the abuser to maintain control over the victim’s life, long after they have separated. In the modern age, this fear is not irrational, and technology has facilitated that stalking behaviour. For victims of abuse who go out with a gang member this fear is compounded. Not only are they intimidated by their partner, but by their partner’s friends, family members and the gang. Now it is not just one person they need to be concerned about, but multiple people who have reputations for violence.

*‘The control melds to the commitment [to the gang]’*

For those who were never fully participant in the gang, there is still the fear that ‘they know too much’ and are therefore a risk. Therefore, these young women and girls do not want to be seen, and they certainly won’t be cooperative because speaking to the police is not worth the (violent) consequences.



Judge Videtta A. Brown (right) in Baltimore.

## 4.2 Ethnic minority specific vulnerabilities

For girls from an ethnic minority group who are victims of abuse in their relationships with gang members, there are additional fears that their white counterparts do not have. This was especially evident USA, which has historic issues with racial minorities and statutory services. This is present not only in the police, but in child services, the court system and even some charities.

Numerous people argued that traditionally, domestic abuse services were designed to support an ‘idealised’ version of a domestic abuse victim. This victim, they argued, was white, middle class, educated and had no criminal record. Unfortunately, the women and girls affected by sexual exploitation, human trafficking and abuse from gang members often do not fit that mould. Therefore, specialist services and programmes needed to be developed to understand the needs of these women and the services that they require. This highlights the importance of designing services from a needs perspective rather than a ‘one size fits all’ approach.

An example of commissioning services based on need is the North Virginia Gang Taskforce. In the Counties, the women and girls involved with gangs were predominantly from El Salvador, therefore services for this cohort needed to be bilingual and understanding of the sensitivity in that community due to immigration action. For those women and girls, reporting their abuse would bring the police into their community and could result in deportations. This results in a reluctance to ask for help or engage in services once a need has been identified.

## 4.3 Sexual victimisation

In Philadelphia, there is a specialist court programme in the Juvenile Court; WRAP Court. The pioneer of this programme was Judge Lori Dumas. WRAP Court worked with young people who had been identified as being victims of sexual trafficking. Instead of a custodial sentence the young people were offered opportunities to access support services such as substance abuse, mental health and shelters. Whilst one could argue that court was the last place these young people needed to be, it was interesting to see a trauma informed approach in the USA, where they have the highest incarceration rate of any country.

Judge Dumas pioneered the programme and her work has been recognised by President Barack Obama. In her time at the Court, she saw many young women and girls who were participating in criminal activity but who were also victims of sexual violence and abuse from those they sought love from. This is true for several young women and girls associated with gang activity.

***‘The aim of the programme is to heal from the inside out’***

Once the young person had completed the WRAP programme, they had their record expunged and it was a chance for them to change the course that their lives were taking. The Court hoped to balance accountability for their criminal actions, with an understanding of the background of this young person that led them to this point.

Other professionals that I spoke to during the Fellowship repeatedly spoke of the connections between gangs and sex trafficking, but it was not a common problem for all areas I visited. In New Orleans, anecdote suggested that sex trafficking was seasonal. When there were big conferences or events in the city, girls from outside of the area were tricked into being brought in and forced into prostitution. This varies from state to state. In North Virginia, they described how gang members were involved in sex trafficking of girls in the area. In one case, a gang member had numerous girls that he forced into prostitution daily, after they had finished school. He used girls that he was already exploiting to recruit other girls within the school. His victims came from a variety of backgrounds and had included middle class white girls from private school and most of them were still living at home with their parents. Victims of commercial child sexual exploitation require trauma informed care (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2013), a recommendation that is repeated throughout the paper.

### ***'There is no such thing as a child prostitute'***

Unfortunately, girls are still being charged with prostitution offences in the USA despite being under the age of consent. The consequence of this is the ‘sexual abuse to prison pipeline’ which particularly affects young African American girls. In the USA, unless the trafficker is a parent or ‘caretaker’ defined by state law the court does not offer an alternative to incarceration. Therefore, despite being victims of statutory rape or child abuse they are arrested and charged for prostitution and sent to the juvenile justice system (Human Rights Project for Girls, 2015).

### ***'These are my consequences'***

Another factor to consider is the normalisation of sexual abuse for some of these young women and girls. Unfortunately, some of them consider their sexual and domestic abuse as their consequence for being in a gang, it is normalised and expected. Therefore, they do not see themselves as victims.

## INTERVIEW WITH JUDGE LORI DUMAS

**Location:** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Background:**

**Image:** Ebony Wortham, Judge Lori Dumas, Samantha Jury-Dada (Left to Right)



*What is WRAP court?*

WRAP - "Working to Restore Adolescents' Power", is a specialty court program in the Philadelphia Juvenile Court aimed at helping children with delinquency and/or dependency matters who have been identified by various criminal justice partners as being either at risk for or a victim of commercial sexual exploitation/human trafficking.

*Why was it developed/what was it in response to?*

WRAP was created in response to Pennsylvania's lack of safe harbour legislation. It was also created because there were children in our system who needed specialized attention from the courts due to the trauma they had undergone.

*There are many stakeholders involved, how did you get buy-in?*

Most of the stakeholders came along willingly. No one was forced to be a part of the team. Everyone saw the need and responded.

*What were the immediate benefits of the new system when it was implemented?*

The immediate benefit was twofold. Children who were in dire need of significant personal attention from the Court received treatment which began their healing process. Additionally, stakeholders who did not traditionally work together in a positive way, got an opportunity to do so and to do something that was good for others.

*This project is looking at girls, gangs and their abusive relationships. Do you think this system would be suitable for a cohort of young women/girls who have committed crimes who are identified as being associated with a gang?*

Absolutely! The one factor that bound these victims together was trauma. My belief is that there isn't a girl in the criminal justice system that doesn't possess layers and layers of trauma that need to be addressed. The specialty court brings one on one attention to these youth and wraps necessary services around them, helps them to heal from the inside out and provides the level of concern and love that is missing from our system and their lives.

*Finally, do you think the model has been successful?*

Every one of our youth serviced through WRAP met some goal - THAT is a success!

## 4.4 Domestic violence within the context of community violence

**'She is embarrassed that she is abused and doubly embarrassed because he is a gang member...then she becomes complicit in his crimes'**

While it is not universally true that young men and boys who are involved with gangs will be abusive in their relationship, the trauma they have experienced makes it more likely. Gang members essentially groom one another, they demand complete loyalty and create an atmosphere of fear whilst also giving one another rewards such as material gifts, friendship and protection. These relationships are toxic, but if a young man has been involved in a gang most of his childhood, this is how he has formed most of his attachments. Therefore, he can transfer this model of a relationship onto his partner. To make things more complicated, the girls may have also had a difficult upbringing. Therefore, they share significant trauma backgrounds. This combination can result in an intense and violent relationship.

Unfortunately, many domestic abuse services are not able to provide support to these young people. There are few charities in the UK which offer specific training on how to provide support to girls experiencing abuse perpetrated by a gang member. Brown (2007) argued that teenage victims of domestic abuse whose perpetrators are gang members are 'invisible and under-served'.

Most of the young people that professionals would identify as 'victims' would not consider themselves so. They do not want to see themselves as victims, therefore they will not be accessing victims' services. This makes it harder to keep them safe, as they don't consider themselves being harmed but rather that they are living a 'normal way of life'.

### **'They think they deserve it'**

The Alliance of Concerned Men in Washington DC has a female worker that runs programmes to work with women and girls in neighbourhoods affected by community violence. She advertises the programme to these women by describing it as 'self-love' rather than a domestic abuse intervention. This means that she gets people involved who would not consider themselves victims, often because the abuse is normalised in their community.

Self-esteem building was a key element of the North Virginia interventions, giving girls a 'better picture of themselves'. They argued that some of the young people they work with believe that they deserve a bad life and have no hope. The programme gives young people the opportunity to hope for a better future for themselves.

Domestic abuse is also responsible for some of the irrational violence displayed by young people in the community. Children raised in abusive households learn to read people and pick up on non-verbal signs which can result in paranoia. What the average person would consider a normal thing to do could be perceived as a slight. Which in turn, can trigger a negative or violent response for the apparent disrespect shown. As such, in Los Angeles the

community intervention advocates undertake domestic abuse awareness training, which is a 40-hour certification and ensures they know what to do if they suspect the person they are working with is a perpetrator or a victim of domestic abuse. They also have monthly training from an in-house trainer on gender, marriage and family counselling so that staff understand the dynamics in different households.

## 4.5 Girls in the criminal justice system

### ***'There is a victim out there that no one cares about'***

Another cohort of girls affected is those actively involved in gang activity. In the UK, this is increasingly through County Lines where they are sent out of their area to transport and sell drugs. Some County Lines gangs also use these young girls for sex trafficking in addition to selling drugs.

Girls in the criminal justice system are not the culturally accepted view of what it means to be a victim. These girls occupy a grey space between victim and perpetrator, where they may legitimately be responsible for a crime such as drug dealing or physical violence but are also being victimised within the gang through an abusive relationship or sexual violence.

With juveniles, one worker said that it was unfortunate that in the USA ‘the focus is on the child’s crime, not the child’s capacity’. While we do not have the same punitive culture with young people here in the UK, we are predicted to see an increase in girls being involved with gang related activity (Whittaker et al, 2018) and girls in the care system are particularly vulnerable. Therefore, local areas must have up to date training available to frontline workers, so that they can identify behaviours that indicate participation in gangs. Additionally, criminal justice professionals must get to grips with the issue of girls in gangs, acknowledge their role and provide suitable pathways for interventions to take place.

## 4.6 Recommendations for working with girls involved with gang members

**R4. Domestic abuse services should be commissioned based on a need analysis of the population.** Specialist services should be included where necessary rather than generic services which often do not meet the needs of the most vulnerable people.

**R5. Domestic abuse practitioners and Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVAs) should be able to access training on how to provide support for women and girls affected by gangs,** in areas where there are high rates of community violence.

**R6. Those working on the frontline with young people affected by gang violence should use a trauma informed approach.**

R7. Services that aim to work with the cohort of women and girls experiencing domestic abuse perpetrated by a gang **member should not advertise their interventions as ‘victim support’ but focus on the outcomes of the programme** (e.g. Employment and housing opportunities, conflict resolution etc.).

R8. **Frontline workers in gang intervention and youth violence should undertake training on the dynamics of power and control and the consequences of domestic abuse.** Many of their service users will have been exposed to domestic abuse at some point in their lives and it will affect their attachments, mental health and wellbeing.

R9. Despite cuts to local authority funding, **training for Social Workers on child sexual exploitation, County Lines, domestic violence and drug trafficking should be made available regularly.** Saturation is key for effective training and if training is not offered regularly it soon goes out of date. The long-term consequences are that Social Workers are unable to identify issues early.

R10. Those working with young women and girls associated with gangs should offer tailored programmes where **goals are decided in partnership with the service user. Working with them, not doing to them.**

## SPOTLIGHT ON THE 'IF PROJECT'

**Location:** Seattle, Washington State

**Background:**

**Website:** [theifproject.com](http://theifproject.com)



When in Washington, I had a conference call with stakeholders that work collaboratively to tackle youth and gang related violence in the City of Seattle. This included officers from the City, the Police and the Mayor's office. One of the people on the call was Detective Kim Bogucki, the co-founder of the 'If project' which works with incarcerated women on turning their lives around.

The If project started when Detective Bogucki asked a group of female prisoners 'if there was something someone could have said or done that would have changed the path that led you here, what would it have been?' This question led to the If Project which works with women to break the cycle of offending, using their own insight into their behaviours. The project has multiple services including youth and community outreach programmes that focus on prevention, a mentoring programme for incarcerated women and prison workshops.

Elements of the programme that make it successful:

- Co-production with the community
- Formerly incarcerated adults assisting with prevention work
- Staff that can identify with young people at risk
- Gender responsive programming – an acknowledgement that men and women need different services
- Customised planning with their service users – no broad-brush approaches
- Setting goals – if they can't be achieved, redirecting them to something that uses the same skills. For example, one of their young people wanted to be in the military but couldn't because of their criminal record, they were redirected to train to be a personal trainer.

The programme has been so successful that there has been an award-winning documentary made about the project, the women involved and the impact that it has had. Detective Bogucki explained that in addition to the programme being effective with young women and girls, the documentary is shown to men and boys to show them the effect of their treatment of the women and girls in their lives. Successful in shining a light on the impact of their abuse and their offending behaviour, especially as some of those in prison were there because of their boyfriends.

## Section 5: Effective techniques deployed in the USA

### 5.1 Credible messengers

***'They bring messages of hope to young people [because] they are upstanding members of the community now'***



Dante (left) and Garnel (right) at the Safe Streets East Baltimore centre.

It is crucial that those on the frontline delivering services that work with young men and women have authenticity. Those met with during the Fellowship, including the police, had carefully and intentionally selected men and women who would be able to reach out and connect to the young people they were working with. These people are credible messengers for the change they want to see in their communities.

***'They know what to look for'***

A credible messenger can connect and work with a target group, authentically and credibly due to their background or experience. Often, those who are passionate about a subject have a personal experience that motivates them. This is certainly true of the VAWG sector, where many are driven by

their first-hand experience of abuse. Having someone who can speak passionately and authentically to vulnerable young people is fundamental to change behaviours. They also have personal experience of successfully leaving a gang and can counsel the young people through the process.

***'They show how things can be done differently'***

In Baltimore, the Violence Interrupters had, in another life, been violence facilitators. Garnel, the site manager for Safe Streets East, had been in prison for 20 years, for several different gang related charges. Now, he is a leader in the very same community, working with young people to stop them going down a similar path. His colleague Dante had a similar background. Their experience guides them to support young people in their community. Other gang intervention projects such as GRASP in Denver had male and female outreach workers that had the ability to build trust with young people. They are living examples of what life can be like as a result of choosing an alternative path.

The first step for an intervention service is getting people engaged in the programme. Recruiting credible messengers, who look and sound like the people they are trying to work with is important. This means recruiting both male and females from the community who can forge relationships in places that statutory services normally struggle to reach.

## 5.2 Female outreach staff

Most of the organisations met with during the Fellowship worked predominantly with boys and men. However, they all acknowledged that there was an increasing need to have staff that can work and relate with female gang members and associates. They believed that to broaden their appeal, they needed to hire more female outreach staff who were able to connect with girls experiencing violence.

Safe Streets spoke about the power and influence of women in the community and their role in stopping violence. This was echoed by those working in Los Angeles, who had numerous female community intervention advocates across the city who were sometimes safer in a neighbourhood than their male counterparts. According to staff, this was especially true in Latino neighbourhoods which were controlled by the mafia. In these areas, men were prevented from working as they were perceived to be a threat. Additionally, both girls and boys were reportedly allowing themselves to be vulnerable in front of female outreach workers in a way they would not have done with men.

But there is an even more important point here: young people are more likely to engage in a service where people look like them.

Earlier in the paper, credible messengers were highlighted as an important technique for delivering gang intervention work (6.1). However, if the service is only male, then for the young women and girls, these services have staff that look and sound like those who have exposed them to violence. To address this, female workers should be employed not only because they can provide role modelling for young boys and men but also it prevents young women from being alienated from the service.

## 5.3 Meeting needs first

Tackling gang and gender-based violence will not be successful if only coming from a criminal justice perspective. All the programmes visited during the Fellowship (including police programmes), sought to understand the individual they were working with and diagnose the issues that were contributing to the person being involved in crime.

In Los Angeles, they explicitly do not refer to the service as gang intervention and prevention in the communities that they work in. Participation is always voluntary and young people are given help with the issues that are holding them back from living an ‘honest life’.

This aligns with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs thesis, that for a person to reach their full potential other needs such as safety and physiological needs must be realised. For example, a young person who lives in a household with substance abuse and poverty may be motivated to deal drugs to pay for food and bills. In this case, the programme would work with the young person and their family to put them on the right track, not pressuring that person to stop their gang involvement until their other needs had been met and they were ready to have the conversation.

## 5.4 Recommendations from effective techniques deployed in the USA

R11. Organisations that deliver frontline services must make an active effort to **recruit representative outreach staff from the communities that they are working in**. Credible messengers are key.

R12. Organisations that deliver frontline services for those affected by gangs should ensure they have **female outreach staff**. Young people are more likely to engage in a service where people look like them, if the team is male, females may be alienated and not seek support.

R13. Relationships are key, **charities and statutory services must work collaboratively and maintain good working relationships** to achieve good outcomes for service users.

R14. Clear pathways for support need to be made available for frontline workers to refer service users into. **Local authorities should produce directories for internal use that includes an up to date list of services that are currently commissioned by the council**. This will allow staff to signpost service users to programmes to meet all needs.

## SPOTLIGHT ON SAFE STREETS BALTIMORE

**Location:** Baltimore, Maryland

**Website:** <https://health.baltimorecity.gov/safestreets>



Safe Streets is an organization that is rooted in the community in Baltimore but funded by the City Health Department. The services they run are neighbourhood based and their focus is working with families to reduce a young person's participation in violence. They use the 'cure violence' methodology, which follows three principles:

- 1) interrupt transmission of the disease
- 2) reduce the risk of the highest risk
- 3) change community norms

The youth workers are called 'violence interrupters' and are from the neighbourhoods they are working with, with many still living there. The fact that they used to be 'part of the scene' and are not law enforcement means they get intelligence that a social worker or outsider would not get.

There is no maximum length of time that they will work with a young person and there is an understanding that during the programme there may be lapses as they try and turn their lives around.

They aim to tackle an underlying culture in the area that 'once you're a criminal, you're always a criminal' and have key principles that they work with the young people on:

- Understanding conflict
- Respect
- Providing opportunities to interact with people in their community
- Providing aspiration

They also ask the young person two questions:

- 1) What do you see yourself becoming if you continue down this path?
- 2) What are your ambitions for yourself?

They partner with local schools and hospitals. The latter is significant because hospitals are private for-profit ventures, yet they are investing funding into the programme. Their motivation is not moral, but financial. Treating gun and knife wounds is an expensive endeavor and most of the people they save do not have insurance and so they are unable to recoup the cost.

A Center for Disease Control funded evaluation conducted by Johns Hopkins University showed statistically significant results across all four communities that Safe Streets worked in, reductions in shootings and killings of 34% to 56%, and evidence of norm change (Center for Disease Control, 2012).

## Section 6: Stakeholders

### 6.1 Police

In the USA the criminal justice system is the first and main defence against gangs. In comparison to the UK, children's services have a lesser role in the USA. This is due to a cultural rejection of a big public sector and varied statutory obligations due to the federal system. During the Fellowship, two police forces shared their experiences in tackling both gender-based violence and gang violence.

The police relied on a variety of methods to identify young boys and girls who may be affected by gang violence. This included being visible in high risk areas by having uniformed officers on patrol. They both argued that the most successful interventions were run in cooperation with schools and the local community.

In Washington DC, they have a school intervention programme which has 12 officers across the district. For comparison, Washington DC has roughly the same population as Liverpool in the UK. This team receives around 5 – 6 reports per day, giving them the intelligence to intervene before situations among young people escalate. They send plain clothes officers to conduct home visits and work with families, offer lunch and activities to young people to divert them from engaging with gangs. For girls identified by the service, they run 'nail days' where they offer a distraction from community violence and give the girls the opportunity to speak in a non-threatening environment. It was clear that the success of their intervention is also due to how relatable and 'normal' the police officers were. They talk the same language, they have grown up in similar neighbourhoods and understand the choices that are facing these young people. They were described as 'roving leaders' in the community, and it was refreshing that they had both male and female officers engaged in this work and had thought about activities that females may want to participate in. Often 'youth engagement' both here and abroad is focused on boys and sports based, while many girls are fully able and willing to participate, the marketing and activities are clearly aimed at boys which may discourage vulnerable young girls from getting the diversion they need.

However, while UK some police forces have a history with racial minorities, the USA is on another level. Baltimore Judge Videtta A. Brown explained how the consequences of police brutality impacts on women experiencing violence from their partners, especially if they are an ethnic minority. In addition to fearing her partner, she does love them and by reporting her abuse to the police she forces her partner to interact with them which could end badly. Historically both here and in the USA, domestic abuse charges are not successfully prosecuted, so for these women the risks involved in calling the police may not weigh up.

## 6.2 Education

### ***'No Principal wants the headache'***

It can be a challenge to engage schools on the topic of youth violence here in the UK. How children react to violence may manifest itself in different ways, but both genders are affected by gang violence. As such, education is a crucial stakeholder in tackling the issue of youth and gender-based violence as they have access to the children on a regular basis.

From the North Virginia Gang Taskforce, to the police in New Orleans, education was identified as a partner they had strong local relationships with, with flow of intelligence both ways and multi-agency working to problem solve and tackle incidents on the school campus.

In Washington DC, the police played an important role in supporting and orchestrating school transfers. They conducted home visits with families and provided support, a pastoral role not as common in the UK due to Children's Services.

### ***'[Some schools] choose not to see it'***

The multi-agency gang taskforce in North Virginia demonstrated how schools were the most important stakeholder for the taskforce to engage with, with their annual school programmes. In the UK, some schools are reluctant to admit there is an issue with gangs due to the reputational damage it may do to the school. Exacerbated by the fragmented education system in which local authorities retain responsibility for outcomes but have less control due to academisation of schools. This is also true of the USA. Organisations said there is a national disincentive to report violence in schools not just because of the consequences from the school board but also because of impact on commerce and pressure from realtors.

### ***'We have to recognize that we are trying to achieve the same goals'***

Unfortunately, schools are often reactive rather than proactive in dealing with issues. In North Virginia the turning point had been the gang related murder of 15-year-old Alexandra Reyes in 2017, in which the ringleader had been a teenage girl. The reality of gang violence had become impossible to ignore any longer. Consequently, schools became more collaborative and put in place initiatives in cooperation with the Taskforce.

In North Virginia now, gang awareness and understanding of related issues such as child sexual exploitation, human trafficking and abuse has become better in schools. They have adopted a collaborative approach with several the big high schools in the area which means they deliver training to pupils and staff, including 2 week long human trafficking awareness sessions in schools.

### ***'Fostering relationships [with schools] is key'***

In Seattle, they felt that the responsibility to aid information sharing between schools and those in authority was with the police. The police argued that because they have officers in schools, out on the beat and in the communities, they were best placed to help improve the relationship between the police, community and education. Their experience was that sometimes schools and administrations can be sheltered from the realities of the communities they are in because of where the crimes take place. To some extent, this could be said for some schools in England. Certainly, in London, very few (if any) of the recent violent incidents involving young people happened on school property. Therefore, schools can argue that it isn't an issue for them, because it is happening outside of the school boundary. Understandably, the reach of schools is limited, they have authority within their own walls and not necessarily in the community. But as schools are a safe haven for these young people, they must be given the tools to work with them on these issues.

## SPOTLIGHT ON THE NORTH VIRGINIA GANG PREVENTION TASKFORCE

**Location:** North Virginia, USA

The North Virginia Gang Prevention Taskforce works across five counties in North Virginia. It is a collaboration between law enforcement and the NGO partner (Northern Virginia Family Service). The area it covers includes varied communities, both culturally and linguistically.

The issues they face in the area include:

- Gangs targeting immigrant youths
- Human trafficking (labour and sexual)
- Poor mental health
- Substance abuse
- Family reunification due to poor family attachments. A consequence of parents being separated from their child during formative years, due to immigration.

All referral sources are trained in how to identify the signs of gang membership, abuse and trafficking. They can receive referrals from the court, police, faith groups, schools and substance abuse programmes.

The taskforce runs a two week programme in human trafficking at school from 7<sup>th</sup> grade (the equivalent of Year 8, in the UK). The partnership between schools and the taskforce is crucial due to the age profile of people involved with gang violence in the area.

Evidence of impact from the Northern Virginia Family Service:

- 75% of known/admitted gang involved youth reduced or eliminated their gang participation
- 75% of participants improved their school performance
- 78% improved family involvement and effective communication

## 6.3 The charity sector

There is an abundance of non-profit organisations that work in communities to deliver outreach and intervention projects in the USA. With the absence of a strong public sector, the charity sector has flourished, delivering several interventions that would be delivered by children's services here in the UK.

There are benefits to having charity partners deliver work in the community, in the UK domestic abuse services are often commissioned externally and local charity partners deliver services. Charities can work with vulnerable people in a way that authorities simply cannot, they have more neutrality and specialist understanding of the subject issue. However, securing long term funding is one of the biggest challenges to delivering high-quality long-term work for charities. In the USA, there appear to be more opportunities for community groups and charities to get funding from the private sector and charitable trusts.

Other drawbacks to having no centralised coordination of services includes the lack of coordination between charities working on the same issue. Because they are competitors, this can limit innovation and prevent best practice being rolled out across an area. Additionally, the multiplicity of charitable organisations in one area resulted in what we would consider poor information sharing practices. In the UK we have much more stringent statutory information sharing guarantees because of safeguarding laws. There was a big fear of sharing information in a forum such as a MARAC or MASH because of litigation culture and the fear of breaching confidentiality and data protection.

In the UK we would benefit from having a central coordinator, to gather best practice on how to tackle gender-based violence associated with gangs. There are multiple organisations that are experts in delivering specialist services, but there is no central forum to share best practice and encourage discussion about trends across the country.

## 6.4 Family and friends

For many young people involved in youth violence, their home life is chaotic. They are living in homes with domestic violence, substance abuse or parents with serious mental health conditions (the toxic trio). Research by Valdez (2007) found that family context was detrimental for females who would later be gang associates. In the cohort of girls he worked with, over six in ten had someone in the house with a drinking problem, eight out of ten had a family member who used drugs and seven out of ten had family members involved in

### CASE STUDY

**Where:** City of Philadelphia  
**What:** The Department of Human Services for the city receive referrals which then get allocated (by zip code) to a community umbrella organisation which delivers the social work/case management service. There are ten different areas, run by six different organisations. As they are in competition with one another for contracts, there is little opportunity for shared learning, no standardised way of working and no shared systems. This means social care is delivered in a very fragmented way and the quality of care you receive depends on where you live.

criminal activity. The absence of strong familial attachments impacts negatively on both boys and girls, who often seek role models elsewhere.

Giving families the support to stay together is an important function for children's services. Not only are outcomes worse for children who enter the care system, the cost of a foster placement is expensive with an average local authority provider costing between £23,000 to £27,000 annually, and an independent provider costing nearly double at £40,000 to £42,000 (National Audit Office, 2014) and demand is going up.

Early help and intervention services identify families at risk of breakup and put a package in place to prevent the situation from getting into a crisis state. However, due to central government cuts non-statutory services are being cut. As budgets are increasingly tightened and demand in children's and adult social care goes up, these family-oriented services are not prioritised.

**What is the one thing you think can tackle the issue of gang violence?**

Understanding their trauma

Communities uniting over a shared vision for the future

Working with families to give parents the support to challenge their children

Building the self-esteem of young people so they see themselves with a bright future

Community development programmes which tackle issues such as unemployment

The Alliance of Concerned Men in Washington DC has been operating since 1991. They do outreach work in communities with high rates of poverty, unemployment and criminality. Their motto is 'ensuring our future one child, on family, one community at a time'. Once they have identified a young person that they want to work with, they engage with the mother and they offer a parental programme. They give mothers and fathers the tools and confidence to parent and challenge their children. They argued that their focus is to teach young people what healthy relationships are and help them to believe in themselves. The Alliance has an 'elder council' which is made up of grandparents, often the first people to take on children when the parents are no longer able to. They use this group of grandparents as a tool in their intervention work because they are respected by people in the community.

Judge Videtta A. Brown in Baltimore explained that the family can also be one of the biggest barriers for young girls to get support for their victimisation. She argued that she has experienced parents who do not want to acknowledge that the issue exists, because of the reflection on them and their parenting. Not only parents whose children are perpetrating violence, but also parents whose daughters are victims of abuse. The shame and embarrassment of 'letting this happen' to their child means they do not seek help.

Working with young people on improving their family attachments (where safe to do so), was something the North Virginia Family Service facilitated on behalf of the North Virginia Gang Taskforce. Because of the demographics of the area, there were unique issues around family attachments between parents and their children due to family separation. For a few the girls and boys in the service, they had not grown up with their parents and so there was less time to build trust and the parents had less authority and confidence. This again demonstrates the importance of commissioning services according to the needs in the community rather than a generalist approach.

## SPOTLIGHT ON BOSTON POLICE OPERATION HOME FRONT

Website: <http://bpnews.com/operation-homefront/>



The Boston Police Department's Operation Homefront is a national award-winning collaboration between the School Police Unit, Youth Violence Strike Force, Boston Public School Police as well as community- and faith-based organisations. This program operates under the premise that the family provides the first line of defence against gang and criminal activity among youth.

Following a referral, law enforcement officers, Boston Public Schools, service providers, or clergy may conduct weekly home visits to inform parents or guardians about their child's behaviour and to educate them about the warning signs of criminal and/or gang involvement.

This effort sends a strong message to identified youth that neither their school, their community, nor, most importantly, their home will tolerate their actions. In situations that warrant additional services, the School Police Unit will make referrals to social workers at Youth Connect.

In 2007, the School Police Unit made approximately 550 home visits. Officers reported a success rate of 80%. More than 50 faith-based partners participated in the program providing more than 100 schools with an intervention plan for at-risk students and student bodies.

## 6.5 Communities

***'We need to understand that this domestic violence is taking place within the context of community violence'***

Researchers at the Prevention Institute reinforced the theory that strengthening communities was an important thing to do for long term resolutions to tackling gang violence and community violence. Indeed, rather than looking at cases on an individual level they argued that it was important to understand how communities were functioning. The impact of violence in a community is not solely limited to the aggressor and the victim. The community feels the consequences of heightened police presence, negative press about the area and their neighbours being victimised.

This is as true in the UK, as a former resident in Southwark the violence in the community impacted on my daily life, despite not being personally victimised. My experiences as a private citizen included coming home from work and finding blood and police outside my home on multiple occasions, police chases outside my window and witnessing a young person be stabbed in the park on a Sunday afternoon. All these experiences took place within a three-year window, those that lived in my community for even longer would have even more stories to tell. The consequences of not tackling violence results in whole communities being exposed to trauma.

It is important to understand community trauma, and the impact that this has on children. It can lead to multigenerational poverty, desensitisation to violence and involvement in crime. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) impact on the life chances of a person. Staff from the Prevention Institute argued that not only are there Adverse Childhood Experiences to take into consideration, but Adverse Community Experiences too. This means that community leaders are important stakeholders in tackling community violence, including associated gender-based violence which has become normalised and accepted.

### ***'Whole communities are traumatised by the impact of violence'***

Analysis by Howell and Griffiths (2019) argued that a community-based strategy is important specifically for girls and women. Required to ‘preserve girls’ healthy social and personal development without the necessity of moving out of established homesteads and away from family ties and networks’.

Community leaders can access families and have status and respect in a way that authorities do not. But if they are not equipped to intervene, they cannot be expected to. In some communities in New Orleans, community leaders are too fearful to engage with the police on gang violence intervention, they do not want to be murdered. But change happens when people take ownership of their communities and have the power to say that violence is not okay. Politicians have an important role to play here. They have the resources, authority and networks available to coordinate community leaders and local frontline services to change neighbourhoods for good. Encouraging communities to work together to change the norms that exist in their neighbourhoods (whether that is domestic abuse, youth violence, open drug dealing) means they are having a collective impact.

## **6.6 Recommendations for stakeholders**

R15. Police should not lose sight of the importance of **community policing** in areas with gang violence.

**R16. Police should continue to actively recruit people from a variety of different backgrounds.** This means they can have **credible messengers** within the force, which will build trust and enable intelligence gathering.

**R17. Information sharing protocols should be established between schools, the police and local authority in areas where young people are at risk of being involved in**

**gangs.** The relay scheme has proven successful in providing support for children who live in a home with domestic abuse, the same principle applies. It results in effective and open information sharing which enables all stakeholders involved to identify and work with children who may be affected by gangs.

**R18. Training and resources on how to support both boys and girls to be made available for schools in areas where pupils are high risk of being affected by gangs.** With **clear referral pathways** for teachers to refer young people to get support.

**R19. There should be an effort to coordinate charities in the UK that offer support to girls affected by gangs.** This would enable the sharing of innovative practice and pull together an evidence base of best practice in the sector.

**R20.** Charities that offer ‘youth services’ should ensure they are **marketing programmes designed for gang intervention in an inclusive manner** that encourages girls to participate.

**R21.** Despite cuts from central government, **local authorities should not reduce the number of family focused interventions they provide in Early Help.** If the household remains dysfunctional after doing intensive work with a young person, they may relapse if the norms at home have not changed.

**R22. Local and national politicians should take responsibility for coordinating community leaders and frontline services** to tackle the issues of domestic abuse and community violence. They have the networks, authority and resource to galvanise change.

## Section 7: Conclusions and next steps

### 7.1 Conclusion

The role of girls in gangs is varied, but they experience gender specific consequences for being associated with a gang. There is no intervention that will universally work with this cohort of young women and girls. However, this report has outlined that there are key techniques and tools that can be successfully applied to provide support for these girls and their abusive relationships. It requires a collaborative approach, coordination and an acknowledgement of the varied roles they have.

The first step in tackling gender-based violence associated with gangs is to acknowledge that these women and girls exist. Services cannot continue to be commissioned as though gang violence is an issue that only impacts on one gender. These young men have sisters and girlfriends who are at risk and are currently invisible to services.

As local authorities continue to face budget cuts, responsibility for tackling youth violence will fall to the police and the communities themselves and will become more reactive rather than proactive. However, investment in the right areas can result in communities having the resources and tools to take back control and improve the lives of those in their area.

Relationships and trust are fundamental for changing behaviours and norms. Having credible messengers, who understand the lives of these women and girls is crucial. Many women are currently taking on this role in their community, without pay or resources. There is a responsibility from delivery partners to ensure they are utilising the most effective people in the communities that they are working with.

Finally, agents from the FBI put it eloquently when they said that all the work that goes into tackling gang violence is ‘giving a neighbourhood the opportunity to reclaim their community’. This is a recognition that no one agency can tackle this issue alone, it is a collaboration.

### 7.2 Recommendations

Throughout this paper, I have made a series of recommendations for commissioners, police, education and delivery partners.

**R1. Police need to tackle the culture that results in women and girls associated with gangs not being acknowledged.**

**R2. A gender audit of police gang databases** should be undertaken to assess whether the practice is widespread.

R3. Police should undertake regular and comprehensive domestic abuse training, to understand the dynamics of power and control in relationships.

R4. Domestic abuse services should be commissioned based on a need analysis of the population. Specialist services should be included where necessary rather than generic services which often do not meet the needs of the most vulnerable people.

R5. Domestic abuse practitioners and IDVAs should be able to access training on how to provide support for women and girls affected by gangs, in areas where there are high rates of community violence.

R6. Those working on the frontline with young people affected by gang violence should use a **trauma informed approach**.

R7. Services that aim to work with the cohort of women and girls experiencing domestic abuse perpetrated by a gang **member should not advertise their interventions as ‘victim support’ but focus on the outcomes of the programme** (e.g. Employment and housing opportunities, conflict resolution etc.).

R8. **Frontline workers in gang intervention and youth violence should undertake training on the dynamics of power and control and the consequences of domestic abuse.** Many of their service users will have been exposed to domestic abuse at some point in their lives and it will affect their attachments, mental health and wellbeing.

R9. Despite cuts to local authority funding, **training for Social Workers on child sexual exploitation, County Lines, domestic violence and drug trafficking should be made available regularly.** Saturation is key for effective training and if training is not offered regularly it soon goes out of date. The long-term consequences are that Social Workers are unable to identify issues early.

R10. Those working with young women and girls associated with gangs should offer tailored programmes where **goals are decided in partnership with the service user. Working with them, not doing to them.**

R11. Organisations that deliver frontline services must make an active effort to **recruit representative outreach staff from the communities that they are working in.** Credible messengers are key.

R12. Organisations that deliver frontline services for those affected by gangs should ensure they have **female outreach staff.** Young people are more likely to engage in a service where people look like them, if the team is male, females may be alienated and not seek support.

R13. Relationships are key, **charities and statutory services must work collaboratively and maintain good working relationships** to achieve good outcomes for service users.

R14. Clear pathways for support need to be made available for frontline workers to refer service users into. **Local authorities should produce directories for internal use that**

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**includes an up to date list of services that are currently commissioned by the council.**  
This will allow staff to signpost service users to programmes to meet all needs.

R15. Police should not lose sight of the importance of **community policing** in areas with gang violence.

**R16. Police should continue to actively recruit people from a variety of different backgrounds.** This means they can have **credible messengers** within the force, which will build trust and enable intelligence gathering.

**R17. Information sharing protocols should be established between schools, the police and local authority in areas where young people are at risk of being involved in gangs.** The relay scheme has proven successful in providing support for children who live in a home with domestic abuse, the same principle applies. It results in effective and open information sharing which enables all stakeholders involved to identify and work with children who may be affected by gangs.

**R18. Training and resources on how to support both boys and girls to be made available for schools in areas where pupils are high risk of being affected by gangs.** With **clear referral pathways** for teachers to refer young people to get support.

**R19. There should be an effort to coordinate charities in the UK that offer support to girls affected by gangs.** This would enable the sharing of innovative practice and pull together an evidence base of best practice in the sector.

R20. Charities that offer ‘youth services’ should ensure they are **marketing programmes designed for gang intervention in an inclusive manner** that encourages girls to participate.

R21. Despite cuts from central government, **local authorities should not reduce the number of family focused interventions they provide in Early Help.** If the household remains dysfunctional after doing intensive work with a young person, they may relapse if the norms at home have not changed.

**R22. Local and national politicians should take responsibility for coordinating community leaders and frontline services** to tackle the issues of domestic abuse and community violence. They have the networks, authority and resource to galvanize change.

# Glossary

**Bloods** - The original blood family are a gang in the USA which is widely known for its rivalry with the Crips. They are identified by symbols, gang hand gestures and members wearing red. They are one of the most violent street gangs in the USA.

**CSE** – Child sexual exploitation

**Crips** – A gang based in the USA, its members traditionally wear blue and they are one of the most violent street gangs in the USA.

**IDVA** – Independent Domestic Violence Advisor

**MARAC** – Multi-agency risk assessment conference

**MASH** – Multi-agency safeguarding hub

**MOPAC** – The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, the commissioning arm of the London Metropolitan Police (Headed by the Mayor of London)

**MS-13** - Mara Salvatrucha is an international criminal gang that originated in Los Angeles. Most members are Central American. They are associated with human trafficking.

**Relay scheme** – A school notification service where incidents of domestic abuse that have been reported in the previous 24 hours to a police force are passed on to the school, regardless of whether the child was a witness or in the home.

**Safe Harbour Legislation** – Safe Harbour Legislation has been developed and centred on the decriminalisation of 'juvenile prostitution'

**VAWG** – Violence against women and girls

## References and further reading

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- Youth Justice Board/ Ministry of Justice, *Youth Justice statistics*, England and Wales 2016/17

# Appendix A: Organisations that sent representatives to meet or talk with me during the Fellowship

Name	Location	Website
The New York Black Prosecutors Association	New York	<a href="http://blackprosecutors.org/">http://blackprosecutors.org/</a>
The Manhattan Family Justice Centre	Manhattan, New York	<a href="https://www1.nyc.gov/site/ocdv/programs/family-justice-centers.page">https://www1.nyc.gov/site/ocdv/programs/family-justice-centers.page</a>
City of Philadelphia, Office of Grants	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	-
The Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Centre	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	-
Ebony Wortham, Supervisor in the Juvenile Court (Philadelphia District Attorney's Office)	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	-
Judge Lori Dumas	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	-
Judge Videtta A. Brown	Baltimore, Maryland	-
Safe Streets	Baltimore, Maryland	<a href="https://health.baltimorecity.gov/safestreets">https://health.baltimorecity.gov/safestreets</a>
The International Centre for Research on Women	International	<a href="https://www.icrw.org/">https://www.icrw.org/</a>
The Alliance of Concerned Men	Washington DC	<a href="http://www.allianceofconcernedmen.org/">http://www.allianceofconcernedmen.org/</a>
Professor Scott Decker	Arizona State University	<a href="https://asu.pure.elsevier.com/en/persons/scott-decker">https://asu.pure.elsevier.com/en/persons/scott-decker</a>
The Director of Los Angeles Mayor's Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development	Los Angeles, California	<a href="https://www.lagryd.org/">https://www.lagryd.org/</a>
Girls Inc	USA	<a href="https://girlsinc.org/">https://girlsinc.org/</a>
The Denver Gang Rescue and Support Project (GRASP)	Denver	<a href="http://graspyouth.org/">http://graspyouth.org/</a>
The North Virginia Gang Taskforce	North Virginia	<a href="http://www.preventgangsnova.org/">http://www.preventgangsnova.org/</a>
RAND Corporation	USA	<a href="https://www.rand.org/">https://www.rand.org/</a>
The Office of Representative Sheila Lee Jackson of Texas	Washington DC	-

The American Psychological Association	USA	<a href="https://www.apa.org/">https://www.apa.org/</a>
The Washington Metropolitan Police Department	Washington, District of Columbia	-
The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention	USA	<a href="https://www.cdc.gov/">https://www.cdc.gov/</a>
Human Services Department, Seattle City Government	Seattle, Washington	-
Seattle Police	Seattle, Washington	-
Office of the Police Commissioner, Boston Police	Boston, Massachusetts	-
The If project	Seattle, Washington	<a href="http://www.ifproject.com">http://www.ifproject.com</a>
The Prevention Institute	USA	<a href="https://www.preventioninstitute.org/">https://www.preventioninstitute.org/</a>
The New Orleans Police Department (NOPD)	New Orleans, Louisiana	-
Crimes against children research centre	USA	<a href="http://unh.edu/ccrc/">http://unh.edu/ccrc/</a>
The FBI	New Orleans, Louisiana	-

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It has been wonderful to meet so many people passionate about youth justice, tackling domestic violence and stopping a cycle of violence for vulnerable young people.