Citizenship learning activities

Streets of fear? Citizenship, gangs and crime

Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme

LSIS LEARNING AND SKILLS IMPROVEMENT SERVICE

Streets of fear?
Citizenship, gangs and crime

Introduction for staff

There is considerable concern about gang culture and street crime among parents, teachers, politicians, the police and the media. There are frequent reports in the media about some young people engaging in crime and violence on the streets of Britain's towns and cities. Stories of robbery, gang wars, stabbings, anti-social behaviour, drug-related incidents all play a part in making people feel unsafe on the streets and creates fear of young people. But often forgotten in the commentary are the views of young people themselves, who report increasing levels of fear for their own safety on the street. They are far more often the victims of crime than adults, since they are more likely to be out after dark, seeking safety in groups, which may, in fact, trigger conflicts with others.

At the same time many young people object to the way they are described by the press, who often present a picture of all under 21-year olds as 'feral', 'undisciplined' and 'morally blank'[1]. Indeed, the children's charity Barnardo's became so concerned about this common image of young people that they launched a campaign to try to change it.

They say: "Most children are not troublesome. They attend school, take part in activities and many volunteer in their communities. Despite this, society has the perception that children are responsible for a significant amount of antisocial behaviour and crime and are becoming increasingly intolerant. Society is demonising its young people."[2]

Young people have always sought the friendship of others of their own age and tend to congregate in peer groups. Most of these groups do not deserve the emotive title of 'gang'; they are not hierarchical or focused on criminal or anti-social behaviour. But in the poorer deprived parts of cities, gangs do form, and gang membership can, indeed, lead young people into dangerous and violent situations, which can terrify people living in their neighbourhoods. Addressing these issues can be challenging for both staff and young people – the Safe Colleges website[3] promotes a whole-organisation approach to tackling the issues of gangs, guns and knives. One approach to gangs suggests that the young people who join are looking for friendship, support, security and a sense of belonging. A *Guardian* report[4] quoted research that found 31 per cent of young gang members gave protection and friendship as the main reasons for their membership. The key questions for all those concerned about gang violence are:

- how can the friendship generated in gangs be redirected to positive ends? and

- how can we stop young people carrying guns and knives, so that minor conflicts don't lead to violent deaths?

[1] *Daily Mail*, 29 April 2002 – www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/columnists/article-117582/How-Blair-unleashed-wolf-children.html

[2] 'Children in trouble' campaign – www.barnardos.org.uk

[3] See www.excellencegateway.org.uk/safecolleges

[4] 'A leap of faith', *Society Guardian*, 16 July 2003 – www.guardian.co.uk/society/2003/jul/16/youthjustice.crime

Citizenship learning opportunities

These materials are aimed at young people working at level 2 and above and can be adapted for learners at other levels. The issues are clearly very sensitive, but the experience suggests that young people are keen to take a lead on these issues and work with others in the local community to promote safer behaviour – taking appropriate action is a key feature of citizenship education. The materials encourage young people to explore:

• images of young people in the media;

• why people get into trouble and join gangs;

• what approaches have been taken to prevent gang violence and street crime and the effectiveness of current campaigns.

In particular, they provide ideas for ways in which young people can work with others in the community to help devise solutions.

For further guidance on approaching sensitive and controversial issues see also *Agree to disagree: citizenship and controversial issues (*see resources page 13).

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Suggestions for using the materials

- **Images of youth** (pages 6 and 7) uses headlines to raise questions about the way in which young people are most often portrayed in the media. The activity encourages young people to challenge the stereotypes and to consider ways in which they can promote a more positive image, perhaps through their own local newspapers. Some organisations have their own radio stations and they could run a phone-in on the issue. Alternatively young people could organise a survey among their peers. For this activity you could also use the images on pages 3, 4 and 6 as stimulus.

- **Why do young people get into trouble?** (pages 8 and 9) encourages discussion of the reasons for youth offending. It provides quotes from young offenders[5] and a card sort activity to help learners understand the many different reasons. You could copy and cut up the cards so that each pair or small group can sort them into agree/disagree piles, or you could ask them to put the reasons in order of importance.

- **Why join a gang?** (page 10) examines some of the reasons young people give for joining a gang and uses six quotes from young people from the 'This is Local London' website as illustrations[6]. Many young people will have knowledge of gangs in their area and will be able to offer their own views on this. They could carry out some research after reading the article from the website. Young people could also conduct a survey or take part in a discussion on why some reasons for joining gangs might be more prevalent that others.

- **What might work?** (pages 11 and 12) looks at the different political positions on youth crime and also some of the outreach organisations that are trying different ways to help young people at risk of trouble. Learners can discuss the different approaches and carry out some research amongst their friends; a focus could be on whether different age groups choose different political positions. Findings could be linked to previous work on media stereotypes from the 'Images of youth' activity (pages 6 and 7) in terms of how this shapes public opinion. They could also visit the websites of the different organisations to find out more about their aims and projects.

- **What could you do?** (page 13) provides a short case study of action taken at Croydon College. Six suggestions are made for youth-led action in their own organisations.

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[5] 'My life in crime: Four young offenders confess all', *The Independent*, 13 April 2008

[6] www.thisislocallondon.co.uk/news/1255213.why_kids_join_gangs_and_how_to_save_them

Images of youth

"People talk about us, not to us," say young people in a 'Youth Special' edition of *Society Guardian*. A panel of young people researched and wrote the supplement. Its aim was to counter the barrage of negative stories about young people, and to present the stories of real young people sometimes living difficult lives but doing their best. Visit www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/apr/15/stereotypes-young-people

This selection of recent headlines from popular newspapers illustrate the negative stories.

© Matt Cardy/Getty Images

Feral Britain in our back yard!

Let-off for teenage thugs who say sorry to their victims

The Feral Sex: The terrifying rise of violent girl gangs

4 out of 5 knife yobs avoid jail

Thugs consider Asbos a 'diploma', says report

Ban on gang thugs owning attack dogs

Half of British adults are scared of children who 'behave like feral animals'

Activities

- What kinds of images of young people do these headlines and the photos suggest?

- Find articles from national papers that cover stories like these and examine the words used in them.

- Write an article about you and your friends, giving a different image of young people. Send it to your local newspaper. Look at the next handout and study the tips for working with the media and promoting a more positive image. See also the 'Positive images' article on the handout – could you persuade your local newspaper to take regular reports from you?

- Think about entering for the annual Positive Images Award (*Children and Young People Now*, see www.cypnow.co.uk/BigIssues/Details/48990/positive-images-awards)

Tips for working with the media

Do

- Get to know the journalists on your local newspapers and TV newsrooms.

- Study the media to find out what makes the news.

- If you feel unfairly treated, contact the editor. Study the Press Complaints Commission's Code of Practice so you know if there are grounds for complaint.

- If you and other young people are to face the media, practise doing mock interviews.

- Remind other young people that they don't have to answer a question if they don't want to.

Don't

- Spend time and money on publicity events before you know if they're going to be newsworthy.

- Invite the media to an event if you cannot control their access to you and other young people.

- Expect the media to voluntarily produce glowing stories – you have to make it happen.

Positive images: Local newspaper to hire teen reporters

Young People Now, 15 December 2004

The Gloucester newspaper *The Citizen* is hiring young people to work as reporters as part of a scheme to get teenagers involved in the media.

From next year, the Stroud-based newspaper will commission young people to report on events in their local area as part of The Citizen Young Reporter scheme.

Speaking at the UK Youth Parliament's Young People in the Media debate last week, Ian Mean, editor of *The Citizen*, said young people will act as "ears in the local community". They will also be offered work placements on the paper.

Alex Farrow, 15, UK Youth Parliament member for Stroud and the Cotswolds, already writes a regular column for *The Citizen*. He said: "It is all well and good for us to sit there and complain about the media, but this doesn't tell them what young people are really like."

The Citizen Young Reporter scheme will be funded by the newspaper and supported by Gloucestershire County Council and the Learning and Skills Council.

Does your local paper employ a teen reporter? If not, suggest it to them.

Why do young people get into trouble?

Despite the fact that most young people do not deserve the negative image portrayed in the press, there is no avoiding the fact that some young people do behave badly on the streets, commit crimes and some join gangs – a range of motivations and feelings contribute to this. The following quotes from young offenders give some of their reasons for getting into crime. Read them all and list the different reasons they give.

I used to live with my dad. He doesn't really care. When I was in trouble and had to go home, I'd stand at the door not wanting to ring the bell. Ding-dong. He'd throw down the keys and it was like getting hit by a bomb. Then I'd rush into the bedroom quick and I'd think, don't come in, don't come in. But he always came in and I'd get the **** knocked out of me. I got used to it after a while. It was: here we go again. **Joe, 15**

I was a bright kid in primary school and didn't get into any trouble, but I had an unlucky start with my family. My dad went off, my mother had a new husband and I had lots of little brothers and sisters. From the ages of about seven to 10 there were fights all the time. My mother, my stepfather, my brother, me. The police used to come, sometimes three times a day. I'd cry myself to sleep every night, covered in blood, listening to the rats. My mother was running around a lot. I don't judge her for this. I think she was into class As [drugs]. So she'd go off for two weeks, no food in the house. I was in charge, changing nappies, getting kids to school. My first arrest was for stealing a tin of SMA Gold baby milk. **Germain, 18**

A lot of fighting I do is caused by boredom. And the excitement of being in a gang. When I was in primary school we waited at the gates of another school with the parents and at 3.30pm they opened the gates and we ran in and battered the kids. I took it more seriously than the others; I was out to hurt them more. Probably it came from watching films: you see it on a film and you want to do it yourself. **Joe, 15**

I come from an estate in the Midlands where everyone's related. I hung around with my generation, who were all older than me. We were close, but there was fighting between the families. Once my Dad got stabbed for beating up the family that beat up my brother. Dad couldn't work because of an industrial accident and for years money was tight because we were waiting for the compensation. When I was young my parents were on base [strong amphetamines]; there were loads of parties downstairs. Then someone died on coke and the parties stopped. My first arrest was when some bigger kids hot-wired a car. I had to pretend I'd been driving it because I was 12 and wouldn't go to jail. After that, because I was small and skinny, they used me for burglaries – I'd fit through top windows. **Helen, 17**

At secondary school, I was arrested almost every day. I started with the Bob Marley [marijuana] and began running away. I was in a gang and we'd go everywhere, down to the south coast, robbing shops, people on buses. Sometime just a few of us, sometimes 30. I was a gang leader and if anyone attacked a gang member... well, I remember this kid... I beat him up really bad. **Germain, 18**

I've only robbed one person, when I was 13. My parents don't have any money to buy me clothes or a phone and there was this girl with a nice phone, money, jewellery. So I went up to her and patted her down and took her phone. Afterwards I felt quite bad. I wanted to give it back to her. I'm a nice girl. But I did do one other thing which wasn't nice. I was a bit depressed at the time and I saw this young girl and thought she looks so happy, she's rich, she's got everything she wants, she's still in school. I wanted just to destroy her face a little bit and I really punched her; her face was bad. **Steffi, 15**

Now look at these reasons sometimes given to explain why young people get into trouble with the law.

Which ones do you agree with?
Which do you think are the most likely reasons?
Add two of your own.

Not doing well at school with studies	**Parents unable to control them**
Influenced by friends	**Not very intelligent**
Come from a poor family	**Bored and looking for a 'buzz' and some excitement**
Trying to impress other young people	**Looking for adult attention**
Feeling as if they are not respected	**History of crime in the family**
Drugs/alcohol	**Parents split up**
Harsh discipline	**No discipline**
No skills	**Feeling unloved**
Add your own:	Add your own:

Why join a gang?

All human beings are social animals – it's in our nature and we could not survive as a species if we tried to live entirely alone. We need each other to produce new members of our species, to protect those new members and ourselves, to help provide food, to provide companionship, to pass on information. So all humans need to be part of different groups – families, friends, workmates.

Most young people belong to a number of different groups but, in particular, they like to have friends and to spend time in their company. For young people, the peer group has a powerful effect on individual members, sometimes expecting, even forcing them to behave in ways acceptable to that group which might not be acceptable to the individual but which they might nevertheless go along with. When the relationships with members of one group become more important than any others, when the group expects individual members to put group loyalty before anything else, when the group punishes members who step out of line and when violence becomes part of the group's identity, it begins to look like a 'gang'.

So why do some young people join gangs?

Here are some comments from a message board (reproduced uncorrected):

> Being a gang member is hard, but I think when kids join gangs it's because of the following reasons: mental abuse, physical abuse, and neglect or lack of communications. Mental abuse, when parents do not pay attention to their children; children want to have the love and where can they find it? Only in the gang member, gangs give love and support even though they do violent things. Being a gang member, makes every child has a power and love and get what they want such as money, girls, and power. However, parents who have gang children, they should pay very close attention to their children in order to keep away from any gang member.

> The meaning of being in a gang is having protections against people who want to hurt you. I can say i wanna be in a gang just because i am treated like **** where i live and i would rather live a life of violence and in jail then be in a life where your parents hate you and your told that your stupid and only there to do work for them. it just sucks waking up everyday knowing that your family hates you.

> ...nt evry1 joins a gang because they r forced to... some other people join, just to be known an recognised in the society... main thing to consider for any 1 who wana join a gang is to think about the people that lost their lives because they r in a gang, and the families that av lost their love ones...

Look at this list of what members get from gang membership. Choose the **three** that you think are the most important and **add more** that you think are missing from the list in the box below.

Recognition	**Power over others**	**Excitement**
Money from crime	**Friends**	**Acceptance**
Belonging	**Way of life in the area**	**Drugs**
Protection	**Territory**	**Respect**

What might work?

People take different political positions on what ought to be done about youth crime and gang membership.

Read each of these positions and decide which one you agree with.

1. Tackling poverty

Some people say that poverty, inequality, and family breakdown will always lead to some children being brought up without ambition to do well. They may come from homes where no one has a job. These young people will sometimes drift into trouble. People who think this is the reason for crime say that the answer lies in government action to support the poor and to reduce inequality.

2. Police powers and punishment

Other people look for answers in the criminal justice system and argue that where young people have not been brought up to respect the law and other people's rights, they should learn the hard way through punishment. They would like to see harsher laws and more powers for the police and courts.

3. Early intervention

Some would like to see less punishment and more support for young people who are known to have problems at home, or with drugs or alcohol. For these people, the answer is neighbourhood policing, with informal warnings issued to wrong-doers who make good the harm they have caused and with parents involved in schemes such as parental mentoring. Schools also need to have the staff necessary to keep difficult young people in school instead of excluding them.

What would YOU do about young people at risk?

How could they be turned away from a life of crime and imprisonment?

Ask around amongst your friends and find out what they think would work best.

There are a number of outreach projects that are working directly with young people. Read about the following organisations, research them further and consider their likely effectiveness.

Eastside Young Leaders' Academy

Ray Lewis is founder and head of Eastside Young Leaders' Academy (EYLA). It works with black boys aged eight to 18 at risk of exclusion.

Boys are referred to EYLA for disruptive behaviour of one kind or another. They spend three or four evenings a week at EYLA plus Saturday mornings and holidays. They are given support with their education and provided with a mentor. There is strict discipline and they are taught about their culture and appropriate ways to behave.

Find out more at www.eyla.org.uk/index.htm

See also www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2009/apr/11/right-way-to-raise-children

Kids Company

Kids Company is a charity founded by Camila Batmanghelidjh in 1996 in order to provide practical, emotional and educational support to vulnerable inner-city children and young people. The charity believes that the children who need help suffer from emotional and behavioural difficulties resulting from experiences of trauma and neglect. Many are lone children living in chronic deprivation, with limited or no support from the adults in their family.

Kids Company operates through two street-level centres in south London, as well as offering therapeutic and social work services in over 30 schools.They aim to provide an environment where relationships of empathy and attachment can be fostered between children and trusted adults. The support is tailored to the needs of each individual child. No matter how disturbed a child is, they will never be turned away.

Find out more at www.kidsco.org.uk

Leap confronting conflict

Leap was formed in 1987. It believes that the processes of conflict resolution and mediation should lie at the heart of all personal and social education programmes for young people. Leap stands for the 'leap of creativity', the 'leap into the unknown' and the 'leap of change' that we all have to make in confronting conflict.

The organisation uses interactive group work, and works with young people who are experiencing disadvantage and exclusion. Each year about 2,400 young people and 500 adults participate directly in Leap's programmes. Around 3,000 more young people are reached through network organisations and the professionals Leap has trained.

Find out more at www.leapconfrontingconflict.org.uk

What could you do?

Read this short case study of actions taken by students in Croydon College, south London.

Case study

Students were encouraged to work on an active citizenship project of their choice. As part of this process, one group identified street issues as a matter of concern to them, and one they would like to take some action on. The students worked with year 12 students from a local secondary school to plan and run a borough-wide event, raising awareness of street dangers, and in particular of gun and knife crime. The event made positive links between the local authority and the young organisers of the event, who were invited to attend ward meetings, to volunteer for the Victim Support Service and to create and promote an anti-knife pledge-board.

As a result of the success of the first conference, the college was invited to work closely with the local authority and the police to host another, bigger event offered to students from all Croydon schools. The partnership that formed through this event led to a police officer working with Croydon College students on a weekly basis on citizenship issues. A group of eight students carried out a survey of college students which revealed that knife crime was still of real concern and that students wanted to see education for younger children in rights and responsibilities. A plan of action was put to the Borough Commander, suggesting that a new primary school programme be put in place, involving police officers working with college students and other young people from the borough. This work is in development.

A third event, entitled Futures not Funerals, focused on positive action to improve community relations locally and to tackle some of the difficulties arising from gangs and territorialism. The students who organised this have joined some of the local authority committees responsible for tackling knife crime. The students provide a young person's perspective.

Consider some of the following actions that you could take:

- Put on a conference like the ones that happened at Croydon.

- Persuade the local newspaper to allow you to write some articles on street issues.

- Take photographs and mount a display of the local area, showing good and bad points from a young person's perspective. Exhibit the display in the local library or shopping centre.

- Plan a programme of education for primary age children and talk to local head teachers and the police about implementing it.

- Set up an action group of other young people concerned about street safety and hold meetings to discuss what you could do, inviting in local policy makers.

- Work with older people who live in your area on joint projects to help dispel the myths about young people.

Resources

Working with gangs and young people: a toolkit for resolving group conflict, Jessie Feinstein and Nia Imani Kuumba, LEAP: confronting conflict, 2006, £29.99

This manual is intended for all adults working with young people involved in group and gang conflict. It is the culmination of three years' action research with 14–25 year-olds, exploring innovative and engaging ways of working with antagonistic groups.

Burning issues, Gary Hitchin, Sue Henry, Fiona Macbeth and Nic Fine,
LEAP: confronting conflict, £8.00

A pack of 14 posters, each depicting a different aspect of conflict and its impact on our everyday lives. An accompanying booklet outlines key questions and techniques for exploring the themes raised by the posters.

Order both resources from www.leapconfrontingconflict.org.uk

'Children in trouble' campaign, Barnardo's, 2008

www.barnardos.org.uk

'A leap of faith', *Society Guardian*, 16 July 2003

An article that looks in detail at the work of Leap: confronting conflict.

www.guardian.co.uk/society/2003/jul/16/youthjustice.crime

Safe colleges: tacking guns, gangs and knives website

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/safecolleges

Positive Images Awards – annual awards presented to the media and to young people under different categories. Now in their fifth year, the awards aim to encourage the media to take the lead by looking for positive story angles when reporting on young people and youth issues and to encourage youth groups and local authorities to be proactive in publicising positive images of young people. The awards are offered by Children & Young People Now (CYP Now).

www.cypnow.co.uk/BigIssues/Details/48990/positive-images-awards

Young Researcher Network – the National Youth Agency. This network values, supports and encourages research led by young people. It aims to empower young people and raise their voice and influence on matters that affect their lives.

www.nya.org.uk/information/100585/youngresearchernetwork

Check the Label – a campaign launched by Lambeth Council which challenges negative labels of young people and features images of Lambeth teenagers who may seem intimidating but are actually taking part in positive activities.

www.younglambeth.org

Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme

The programme has many resources and materials to enable you to use active learning to support citizenship, including:

Agree to disagree: citizenship and controversial issues, LSIS 2009

A guide to managing controversial issues in enrichment, tutorials or as part of courses.

Getting the show on the road: skills for planning and running citizenship events, QIA 2006

This booklet provides activities to build the skills young people need to plan and run a successful citizenship event for their peers.

Moving forward together: citizenship learning for community cohesion, QIA 2006

The activities in this pack encourage young people to explore what needs to be done to make communities more integrated and cohesive.

For the full range of free Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme resources go to:
www.post16citizenship.org/publications

Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service's aim is to accelerate the drive for excellence in the learning and skills sector, building the sector's own capacity to design, commission and deliver improvement and strategic change. LSIS's vision is that every learner acquires the skills, knowledge and appetite for learning, living and working and every provider is valued by their community and employers for their contribution to sustainable social and economic priorities.

LSIS's *Strategic Ambitions* demonstrates how we will contribute to delivering core improvement principles and sets out our new ways of working to engage the sector in everything we do to make LSIS a truly sector-led organisation. You can find this document and other information about LSIS activities and services at www.lsis.org.uk

Disability equality policy

LSIS is committed to promoting equality for disabled people and we strive to ensure that all our communication and learning materials are available in various formats including large font, audio or braille.

Please contact us at enquiries@lsis.org.uk or 0870 162 0632 quoting the document reference number to request an alternative format.

Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme

The Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme aims to disseminate and support best practice in citizenship across all areas of 16–19 education and training and improve coherence and progression from key stage 4 citizenship to the post-16 phase.

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/citizenship