COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

A Tool to Reducing Group and Gang Violence in London

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the experience of three community development practitioners working in neighbourhoods across London with communities who experience violence and violent crime, identify the common experiences and practical ways in which to support communities to reduce violence and associated trauma and grief.

In each experience, the ability to challenge the imbalance of power is a widespread problem. The practitioners share different community development techniques they have used to approach this challenge. This includes direct and indirect engagement and facilitation; collaboration, brokering relationships and partnership work. The outcome of the interventions provides initial evidence that demonstrates that when a community development approach is used there is;

A more successful community response in managing the complexity of Group and Gang Violence.

A strong collective aim from the community in stopping the issue from increasing

The paper sets out the argument for a proactive approach matched with the need to provide resources for community development in neighbourhoods most affected by group and gang violence. It identifies the need to implement a co-production model supported by community development facilitators working with communities most affected in London and that by embedding community development skills and facilitation within residents and organisations it provides an essential building block to develop robust intelligence, resilience and partnership responses to group and gang violence.

Background

Evidence is drawn from the direct experience of working in North Brixton, Lambeth, Haringey and Westminster over five years. The organisations involved were Big Local, and the Community Development Foundation (CDF). The practitioners held specific roles; one is embedded in the Big Local in North Brixton whilst the other had dual capacity, as an Associate with (CDF) and on-going experience working for Big Local in other areas. This gave a unique opportunity to observe how community development principles could be utilised to great effect within these specific issues.

Big Local aims are to engage with the community and support those who wish to lead in seeking solutions and enabling a safer place in which to live. The CDF involvement was part of a commission by The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) at the end of May 2015 to develop a community voice in the London Boroughs of Lambeth, Haringey and Westminster. It aimed to reduce serious group and gang violence (GGV).

The practitioners involved shared different ways of working with communities, including;

· Direct and indirect engagement work. Direct work with ex-gang members, male and female e.g. facilitating 'talking' meetings and indirect support to communities who experience the impacts of GGV e.g. work with local faith leaders who support the victims of GGV whilst on many occasions also supporting the perpetrators' families;

· Supporting individuals and groups take collective action using their strengths

· Supporting collaborative and partnership work

· Engagement in informal, un-recognised and relationship based activities.

· Independent and unbiased facilitation to bring different participants together

The aim of the above was to challenge power imbalances and address the needs of the community which are fundamental roles for community development. The hypothesis being that when an asset based community development approach is used it leads to the following outcomes;

· A more successful community response in managing the complexity of GGV.

· A shared and collective approach to stopping the issue from increasing.

· Increase support for those involved or affected by GGV.

Arnstein (1969) presented a view on the relationship between community and government by using a ladder as a metaphor for increasing access to decision-making power. In Brixton and Haringey, the practitioners experience from activists and leaders in this environment is that community engagement from Authorities has often been disempowering and tokenistic.
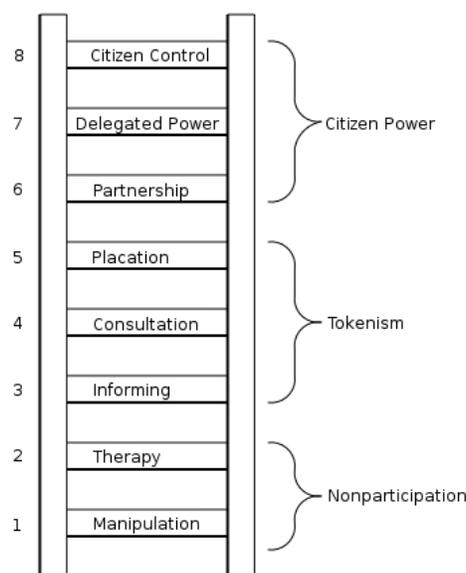
(Arnstein, 1969)

Rather than placing an emphasis on power, the approach adopted by the practitioners was more interested in listening and enabling to influence project or policy outcomes in relation to group and gang violence. Their approach was to ensure the main messages from their engagement with community members were self-advocated by activists and leaders directly to policy makers and decision makers at subsequent meetings they attended.

Community Development is a long term value based process which aims to address imbalances in power and bring about change founded on social justice, equality and inclusion

(source CD National Occupational Standards). Foot and Hopkins, 2010, suggest that often when working with the most marginalized communities there is a default response to plug gaps, rather than build a more resilient, engaging and sustainable modal of practice. They consider that there is a more constructive way of focusing on the assets of the community looking at the healthy aspects that exist and capitalising on them.

"as well as having needs and problems, our most marginalised communities alsohave social, cultural and material assets. Identifying and mobilising these can help them overcome the health challenges they face… The more familiar 'deficit' approach focuses on the problems, needs and deficiencies in a community such as deprivation, illness and health-damaging behaviours. It designs services to fill the gaps and fix the problems. As a result, a community can feel disempowered and dependent; people can become passive recipients of services rather than active agents in their own and their families' lives."

(Foot and Hopkins, 2010, p7)

There is sufficient preliminary evidence to pilot this approach in neighbourhoods affected by GGV, with the aim of now gaining a more substantive evidence base of the efficacy of using a community development model to reduce GGV. (WOLA Special Report, 2008)

Group and Gang Violence - The Context

Group and gang violence is an increasing concern with 225 recognised gangs in London, comprising around 3,600 gang members (of these 58 gangs are considered particularly active). This relatively small number of people are responsible for approximately 17% of serious violence and stabbings, 7% of personal robbery, 40% of shootings and 12% of aggravated burglary in London (Metropolitan Police, 2016). Overall levels are increasing as it is estimated that in 2015 violent offences in London increased by 27% (Official Crime Statistics, 2016).

Whilst there is a growth in the support needs of young people and communities, both youth work and community development services are being cut. UNISON's research from 168 local authorities across the UK, shows that youth services between 2012 and 2014 lost more than £60 millions of funding. This resulted in the loss of 2000 jobs, around 350 youth centres and 41,000 youth service places for young people. In addition to this, at least 35,000 hours of outreach work by youth workers was lost. (Unison, 2014).

Within wider public services there have been continuing cuts to services throughout the UK. In London, local government has seen a 60 per cent real terms reduction in core funding between 2011 and 2014 (London Councils Parliamentary Briefing, 2014). This is having a significant impact with the Local Government Association claiming that "As a result of these cuts councils in many areas will not have enough money to meet all their statutory responsibilities" (London Councils Parliamentary Briefing, 2014).

In addition, during this period community groups and voluntary organisations have faced increased funding challenges. The declining investment in support for communities and young people is impacting on communities and agencies' efforts to reduce gang related violence. With the shrinking of public services and the increased funding challenges for community and voluntary sector organisations there is now a steadily increasing need for communities to fill the gap and play more of an active role in reducing group and gang related violence. Public sector, voluntary sector and community sector each want the same outcome but are driven by different priorities (and performance indicators.) Each stakeholder has to achieve more and do more with less.

The role of asset based community development in reducing GGV

There is an important role and range of activities for community development in the following 5 key inputs:

Programme of neighbourhood and borough based community development activity to identify, establish, form and strengthen community networks and a local voice.

Community development aims to build a picture of the people, connections and communication within communities. Community mobilisation is an important element of one of the most coherent, and best-evaluated, gang interventions, comprehensive Gang Programmes (Kennedy, 2008). This was developed by the US Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) in 1993 (Pitts, 2007). Kennedy also highlighted that communities may be far more effective at deterring crimes than legal authorities (Kennedy, 2008).

Community development activity can play a significant role in strengthening the networks of local people and organisations through which to seek solutions by;

· Establishing who is who in the community

· Engaging in one to one dialogue about their experience of group violence with all parts of the community including the perpetrators,

· Identifying practices that have proved successful

· Building a picture of how the networks could work to help reduce group violence.

This approach relies on open and honest conversations being held, and relationships being built up through independent facilitation or what Gilchrist (2009) defines as 'meta-networking'. It allows individuals to invite other people to join the discussion and signpost other connections who should be followed up. It recognises much of the informal work taking place " below the radar" and the impact this has within communities. Phillimore and McCabe with Andri SoteriProctor and Rebecca Taylor (May 2010) and McCabe and Phillmore (September 2012)

In this area of work there are many overlaps between organisations and interests and multiple community stakeholders who often wear several 'hats'. This complex system of 'players' needs to be acknowledged and understood/analysed: how they are engaged in this work, their relationships with each other and with the statutory agencies as these multiple relationships are really important. Through a series of one to one conversations common understandings are developed across diverse interests. This creates a level platform of understanding which enables larger meetings to be convened. There may still be issues and different views but there is enough of a common opinion and desire to achieve change that the meetings can be focused and facilitated to a shared/agreed outcome.

Once contacts have been made and relationships built, experience shows that different people will be involved with different agendas and/or agencies and that networks are and can be created that span all levels of involvement and engagement.

Skilled external facilitation is key in developing the level ground on which to progress as some communities/organisations are and feel very excluded from the conversation, and in many forums, there are often real or perceived "favourites" who information is shared with.

The development and focus of both emerging and existing community safety and crime networks and partnerships as well as the creation of neighbourhood networks and local networks of affected communities and parents who want to see an end to group and gang violence, provide the basis and link into a Pan-London community network.

For example, in Haringey the community want to link up to the wider Pan-London network Stop Our Kids Being Killed On Our Streets group, which has over 6,000 people in London engaged, and is now forming sub groups to work on taking action.

This strategy involves supporting the local crime and community safety networks, helping to define the role for these networks, developing their influence with statutory providers, particularly local policing agencies and working to enable people to understand these structures and how to influence them.

The network can be a resource in terms of finding people who are:

a) Linked closely to the young people at risk; young people engaged with GGV including those not on the official Gangs Matrix. This matrix is informed by Police and wider statutory partner intelligence based on violence, criminal offending and gang membership. Individuals are added to the matric from Police and partner agencies and older people who have exited gangs thinking about locally based action to reduce violence, and spreading the message against violence (Metropolitan Police Service, 2014).

b) Credible to the gang members i.e. families of people involved in gangs, ex-gang members and faith and community leaders who are willing to speak out and make a stand against violence in their area,

c) Providing local 'intelligence' within and across the community to support confident responses to both existing and emerging challenges and opportunities, with the potential to pre-empt the need for the enforcement approaches implemented by statutory agencies (Kennedy, 2008).

Outcome: A range of GGV networks/ partnerships in neighbourhoods, boroughs and London wide, of local assets within communities which support a cohesive local voice to reduce group and gang violence. By having a variety of GGV networks which are initially facilitated by impartial external facilitators, the range of individuals that are able to engage presents an opportunity to gather different 'voices' and perspectives and support inclusion. This range of engagement enables deeper understanding of the drivers, engines and impacts of group and gang related violence and therefore the common understandings which provide the platform for meaningful and informed discussion between and amongst networks and partnerships.

Building on the network activity above to develop a programme of mapping; capacity and facilitation to develop the voice and the role of voice within the decision-making processes across sectors.

In all local areas, there are community groups and individuals providing information, help and support to young people and communities who are living with GGV. Many of the groups and the range of support they provide will be completely unknown to the statutory agencies, and to each other. Yet they are valuable resources in terms of their local knowledge, what they are providing, much of which is informal, and how they work with young people.

In Brixton capacity building is providing the foundation for 'talking groups' to develop voices of girls who are or have been involved in GGV. These groups are self-help facilitated through the outreach and community development activity of the Big Local Programme. The girls support each other by discussing common concerns and experiences; are developing confidence and their trust in themselves and each other and providing invaluable information and experience about their experiences and roles of GGV.

The girls, through facilitated sessions, are starting to work to shape delivery of a more formal support and learning; to identify networks and resources of existing support and new opportunities for them; and, to educate and prevent other girls from engaging in GGV.

Through the community networks, meetings strengthening of community networks, the community development function can map and link much of this local support activity. By building the map it enables both communities and agencies to understand more about what is on offer and what is being provided, by who, who is using / accessing the offer and in what geographical area. It also starts to provide a picture of the real cost and value of provision.

Through the CDF work this mapping was carried out in Haringey. It helped both statutory and community partners understand more about the bigger picture. The 'map' provided a tool to understand what was going on in the area to reduce group and gang violence by providing information, links and ideas about sources for help. This also provided a basis for service providers to then start to look at the synergy and 'pathways' between services.

Brokering and relationship development and management between the community networks;

Capacity Building & Facilitation

a) Linked decision making and common understanding of process between different partners all wanting the same outcomes but working to different priorities;

b) Decision making and information sharing which is reliable, accurate and appropriate and therefore linked closely to the young people at risk, thinking about locally based action to reduce violence, and spreading the message against violence.

Mapping & Information Sharing

c) Information sharing which is credible to the gang members i.e. families of people involved in gangs, ex-gang members and faith leaders who are willing to speak out and make a stand against violence in their community,

d) Provision of local 'intelligence' within and across the community to support confident responses within the community to both existing and emerging challenges and opportunities, with the potential to pre-empt the need for the enforcement approaches implemented by statutory agencies (Kennedy, 2008)

Outcome: By supporting capacity building activity to develop common understanding, trust, confidence and skills, information sharing is enabled as a platform to provide access and support across sectors and allow efficient working to reduce group and gang violence. For many groups, experience of responses to GGV is enforcement led rather than a preventative approach. Their experience of agencies implementing enforcement are fragmented and inconsistent leading to trust and confidence issues as barriers to action. By identifying networks and partnerships and capacity building them a community development approach provides validation of the 'voice' and experience of those experiencing GGV. In our experience validation offers confidence to enable sharing of information and constructive discussion.

Support and broker organisational culture change across sectors to engage with and value local community networks within decision making processes around group and gang violence

To embed this way of working to tackle group violence, there needs to be an appetite from statutory partners and communities that working together is an important way to achieve results. This requires an acknowledgement from statutory partners that they need to work in this way.

There needs to be a willingness to listen and learn, an openness and lack of defensiveness, and strong local leadership to work with communities as trusted and equal partners at all stages of the process.

Partnership working also relies on communities acknowledging that statutory partners want to make a difference on the ground, and are not just the people to be blamed when things go wrong. There needs to be willingness on both sides to make this a productive and useful partnership. An important initial role for community development is that of independent unbiased facilitation – and brokering bringing partners and communities together to work in this way and enabling them to understand the benefits that partnership working bring to all stakeholders.

In Brixton engagement of some parts of the statutory sector through public meetings initiated and led by the community, have identified an appetite to work with and value local community networks and voice. Initial contact from the statutory sector was guarded based on their experience of engaging with 'the usual suspects' but having seen the engagement across the community underway locally through the Big Local programme parts of the sector have recognised the benefits and reach of community development approaches. The statutory services that

have engaged recognise/realise that enforcement alone does not work and that the statutory sector across Lambeth does not understand how to and who to engage with community interests and local expertise. This has provided the opportunity to start an open conversation around perceptions, common understanding and how meaningful engagement can be developed.

To start meaningful discussion within the community, ongoing and consistent work to develop confidence, trust and understanding is needed through continuing to facilitate the engagement of representative organisations and individuals alongside the statutory sector.

Outcome: Partnership working and a cultural change enabling working with community networks which are representatives of the many community 'voices' rather than the 'usual suspects' including wider participation in decision making around group and gang violence. An incremental change in the range and complexity of the decisions made around local provision, prevention and enforcement towards pooling of budgets.

Pilot a measurement system for establishing the cost/benefits of working in a community focused way, and of using new commissioning and procurement principles to do this.

As outlined above the voluntary and community sector has been hit hard by funding cuts, and the change from grants to commissioned services. The public sector is hard hit also, and is having to focus on providing statutory and essential services.

Through mapping service provision and users, information becomes available to support the commissioning of many services or service offers by community and voluntary sector providers who are established and delivering services. Co design of specifications and clear commissioning and procurement routes

provide the opportunity for CVS providers to access contracting processes and are well placed to be used to pilot systems to establish cost benefits analysis.

To inform the discussion around the cost / benefits of budget pooling the current NHS Devolution pilots provide a model through which to start to understand the impact of community based commissioning. Providing the argument to pilot an approach to community based commissioning of services and pooled budgets for GGV projects can be developed, using the Oracle Theory of Change model to define and measure the impact of GGV and youth programmes on the participants and widening the focus models to capture cost benefit analysis.

By targeting provision and pooling budgets, (including from police or public health) community development informed commissioning provides a transparent and accountable approach to the challenges of funding.

The Our Place model (see MyCommunityrights.org,uk) shows that looking at a cost benefit analysis approach to service delivery can achieve better results and innovative ways of looking at budgets. If the cost of one homicide is £1.7m (Hannah Mills, Sara Skodbo and Peter Blyth October 2013) then even a moderate level of investment in community based preventative and exit work could achieve a good level of payback. Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a method for measuring extra-financial value (i.e., environmental and social value not currently reflected in conventional financial accounts) relative to resources invested. However, capacity of organisations to participate in SROI models has proven resource intensive in an environment with limited and diminishing resources.

If local groups do not have the right capacity to provide services, supporting them so that they are able to develop in order to be able to do this or finding other local groups who can act as mentors or guarantors for the work,

provides the basis for a changed delivery methodology which should then lead to a positive cost benefit result.

Budget pooling and new ways of commissioning services could be considered and pilot ways of measuring cost benefit analysis for this approach should be tested.

Outcome: A framework for cross sectoral working for pooling of budgets and resources to reduce group and gang violence. Building on the models which are currently being piloted through NHS Devolution pilots and the Oracle Theory of Change information the development of a framework for community based commissioning of services which focus on youth and GGV.

Continuing and strengthening the development of the Roles 1-4 the development of safe and productive systems for better information sharing and cooperation at agency level about the link between gang related activity and group violence and serious and organised crime.

Information from communities across the boroughs/ neighbourhoods in which we have experience highlights that there is clearly a strong overlap between those involved in group violence and those involved in organised crime.

Using community development approaches are pivotal to changing GGV on a borough, London wide and national basis. The development of community 'voices'; capacity; trust within and across communities; trust with statutory partners; community based commissioning and decision making and; pooled budgets underpin comprehensive responses to GGV in communities.

Local, London-wide and national knowledge and experience of organised crime asserts that whilst 'supply' of 'foot soldiers' drugs and weapons continue, uninhibited demand for that supply will continue. Therefore, without the sharing of information and partnership co-operation between local and

national agencies around GGV, impact on communities will continue to negatively affect communities, families and individuals. (Castells, 2000)

Concerns have been raised by sections of the community about the way in which information is gathered, e.g. the Metropolitan Police maintain the Gangs Matrix to identify young people most engaged in gang activity, while the National Crime Agency maintain the Serious and Organised Crime data (SOCA). These issues are looked at as being separate and unrelated, when in fact they overlap substantially.

This separation also leads to fears of racial profiling, for example in one area that we work, there are perceptions that many of the young "foot-soldiers" are black, whilst the people on the SOCA list are Turkish. This then leads to a view that young black men are being targeted as gang nominals, whilst those that lead are not targeted.

Outcome: Improved systems and processes for sharing information and participating in decision making between agencies, partnerships and networks. The development of capacity for all stakeholders within boroughs and across London to engage constructively with discussion and decisions around GGV provides an opportunity for comprehensive responses to organised crime and the corresponding locally based GGV.

Conclusion

The methods set out above have provided a practical basis for the need to use community development practices to work with communities facing GGV and address power imbalances and the needs of the community. They have given some initial evidence that when a community development approach is used there is;

· A more successful community response in managing the complexity of GGV.

· A more collective aim in stopping the issue from increasing is developed.

· Support for those involved or affected by GGV is offered

These are, however, derived from our reflexive practice and so pilot projects need to be carried out to test the effectiveness of these ideas. There is also a need to develop an evaluation framework alongside the piloting of the wider techniques into a programme to measure impact and extract lessons for policy and practice.

This paper sets out a clear coherent argument for a proactive approach to provide resources for community development in neighbourhoods most affected by group and gang violence. The key activities show the role community development can play in supporting local communities to reduce group and gang violence. It identifies the need to implement a co-production model supported by community development facilitators working with communities most affected in London. Embedding community development skills and facilitation within residents and organisations is an essential building block to develop robust intelligence, resilience and partnership responses to group and gang violence.

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