



brap

getting off
the merry-
go-round:
gang crime

brap is an equality and human rights charity, inspiring and leading change to make public, private and third sector organisations fit for the needs of a more diverse society. We offer tailored, progressive and common sense approaches to equality training, consultancy and community engagement issues.

'Getting off the Merry-Go-Round' is part of a series of papers outlining our thinking on key areas of policy and practice.

The story so far...

- Urban Rhythms, Street Realities: in 2004 brap ran a large-scale consultation event with over 200 young people and representatives from statutory services in the city, with the event focusing on the effect of music on violence against women
- between 2004-7 brap ran the Black Women's Network which built the capacity of a number of BME women voluntary sector organisations. A significant number of these focused on responding to domestic violence and brap supported these organisations to improve the impact and effectiveness of their work
- 2005 and brap ran a project called 'Gangs and Girls'. Developing the resilience of young women to respond to the pressures of gang involvement, the project focused on helping participants develop their skills in

talking about the risk of gang-life in their area

- in 2008 brap ran 'One Birmingham: Your Future': a Big Lottery-funded project. This involved working with over 800 young people in schools and colleges across Birmingham to explore notions of identity, culture, and equality. As part of this work, we explored young people's attitudes to violence and whether it is appropriate to see some types of violence are seen as 'culturally acceptable'.

who
are
brap?

- brap have recently worked with over 30 young people at risk of becoming involved with gun and gang-related crime. A team of mentors support beneficiaries around employment, self-confidence, anger management, and other issues that can result in gang membership

- in 2012 brap researched how young people feel about the provision of services to prevent and respond to gang-related crime in the city. The final report, *Stuck: the delivery of gang crime interventions*, identified the lack of early intervention in this field

- many interventions designed to support young people in this area are un-evaluated. It is often assumed that they are of benefit because they are run within the community, by people who have had criminal backgrounds, or by people who are from the same ethnic group
- our primary effort has been on prescribing interventions that 'change' young people's attitudes and behaviour. Less time has been spent understanding some of the systemic issues which may contribute towards their unhealthy life choices
- we have tended to ignore areas where we routinely invest in the support and preparation of young people (such as education)
- young people engaged in crime come from a range of different backgrounds. They are not all products of poverty, troubled families, or broken homes
- support may need to include help to build better relationships between young people and their parents – and even support for teachers at school. This can help adults to better relate to young people and keep them motivated towards their goals

the bottom line

- young people can have other un-diagnosed issues which may prevent them from changing their behaviour
- many young people trying to disengage from criminal behaviour can find that programmes to support them to do this lack substance and do not help them to realise their ambitions
- mentoring is often used as a tool to support young people to change their behaviour and develop a more positive outlook on their lives. However, many mentors are not equipped for this task. Young people need a range of different skills to help them to rebuild their lives and, unfortunately, the curriculum developed to distract young people from crime is often limited to sports and music
- provision needs to be developed with clearer exit routes – it needs to lead young people to somewhere positive rather than leading them to the next scheme or project
- most importantly, young people need skills and jobs as a means to support their exit from criminality

- we need to reconfigure our understanding of what a 'problem young person' looks like
- we need very skilled practitioners to work in this area. Currently many workers are volunteers. They may or may not be skilled: the point is though we just seem happy that they are there!
- despite a reduction in crime and a national strategy on ending gang and youth violence, little is known about 'what works'
- more needs to be done to hold agencies to account for the quality of their support to young people
- supporting young people to stay in school should be a priority
- there is a need for creative solutions in terms of employment penetration – especially in the current economic climate where young people with this type of background are likely to be even more disadvantaged

ways forward

brap is a think fair tank, inspiring and leading change to make public, private and third sector organisations fit for the needs of a more diverse society. brap offers tailored, progressive and common sense approaches to equality and human rights training, consultancy and community engagement issues. Registered charity number 1115990

brap

making equality work for **everyone**

brap | 2nd Floor, Lockside | 5 Scotland Street | Birmingham | B1 2RR
Email: brap@brap.org.uk | Telephone: 0121 237 3600 | Fax: 0121 236 7356