

Full Report

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Countering Paramilitary & Organised Criminal Influence on Youth

A Review

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1. Background

In June 2019, a team at Ulster University was commissioned by the Corrymeela Community on behalf of the Education Authority to conduct research on the theme of young people, youth work and tackling paramilitarism in Northern Ireland. The specific tasks were:

- **To research/map the effective and innovative theories/practice of 10–12 international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with youth and actively countering factors that create risk vulnerability, and/or susceptibility related to paramilitarism, organised gangs or criminality.**
- **To enhance the CPD model by integrating and testing the relevance of international frameworks and associated tools that support the technical skills, capacity and well-being of front-line workers.**

The goal was to produce research that could shape debate on the future of youth work intervention to support the Tackling Paramilitarism programme. The chosen method was to review literature on best practice across a number of international models of intervention with young people affected by violence by armed groups of various sorts, and to conduct field research in Northern Ireland. Having analysed the results, the goal was to develop findings based on the research and disseminate those findings through a final report, through the publication of a policy brief to inform practice and through an invited round table of relevant stakeholders.

1.1 Introduction and Rationale

According to the United Nations' (UN) *Missing Peace* report:

In 2016, an estimated 408 million youth (aged 15–29) resided in settings affected by armed conflict or organised violence. This means that at least one in four young people is affected by violence or armed conflict in some way. Estimates of direct conflict deaths in 2015 suggest that more than 90 per cent of all casualties involved young males. However, conflict, crime and other

forms of violence impact young people's lives in more ways than mortality. While it often goes unrecorded, young people suffer from a wide range of short-, medium- and long-term effects ranging from repeated victimization to psychological trauma, identity-based discrimination and social and economic exclusion (United Nations General Assembly Security Council, 2018: 5).

The UN also acknowledged that while young people account for the majority of those engaged in extremist violence, only a 'minute proportion' of the youth population is involved in violence. This brings with it a risk that the focus of policy is placed too easily on the prevention of extremism and not enough on the importance of engaging with young people. At its most extreme, this has involved labelling young people as 'criminals' or 'terrorists', to the detriment of youth participation in political and social life. As a result, resources are misallocated from services that are necessary to address the drivers of violence towards an overly punitive approach, which may be less effective and more costly than preventative measures. Thus:

The political urgency for Governments to respond to the threat of global terrorism has contributed to a discourse in which sweeping characterisations of youth as fundamentally at risk of 'violent extremism' have produced unnuanced, counter-productive policy responses. The 'policy panic' ... is further alienating young people... Instead of offering proactive prevention approaches to violent conflict, it risks cementing young people in these roles, giving them a sense that there are no alternative pathways available to them (United Nations General Assembly Security Council, 2018: 7).

The UN therefore drew attention to the necessity of ensuring not only that violent extremism was 'tackled' but that alternative pathways were developed with an emphasis on participation, economic potential, education and dealing with injustice and human rights. This entails a shift from security responses to a violence prevention approach, building up resilience and based on partnership with young people and youth-led organisations, and requires investment in and inclusion of young people, as well as addressing security concerns.

Youth work necessarily starts from this perspective in its engagement with violent extremism. In principle, all youth work in the area of peacebuilding is guided by UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (December 2015), which commits all signatories, including the UK, to youth participation in decision-making processes, the protection of young people's lives and human rights, promoting a culture of tolerance and intercultural dialogue, engaging young people in developing peacebuilding strategies and investing in young people affected by armed conflict through employment, education and promoting a culture of peace. Above all, the resolution makes clear that the contribution of youth work in peacebuilding is specific, determined by its focus on the well-being and rights of young people rather than on the political, security or policing aspects of peacebuilding.

The task of youth work is to address extremism from the starting point of commitment to the well-being of every young person. In relation to youth engagement in relation to paramilitary behaviour, this is important: youth work cannot be part of 'stopping' a security problem defined as young people's involvement with paramilitarism without reframing that contribution within a commitment to the well-being of young people. In other words, the problem is the challenge of violence, which must be addressed through all means necessary rather than 'young people'. This is not a question of co-opting youth work to security, but of achieving security for all through youth work methods.

This change in perspective raises a number of critical questions, which frame this research report into youth work practice to reduce paramilitarism. In the first instance, any policy to tackle paramilitary violence and organisation that does not engage young people, as both participants and victims, is unlikely to be successful. In addition, the role of youth work is to contribute to that goal from the perspective of the tools it offers: how can youth workers and youth work as a profession prevent and reduce the impact of violence on young people, and reduce marginalisation and exclusion as a consequence?

There is no doubt that, in Northern Ireland, young people in some parts of the community remain disproportionately at risk of being drawn into organised violence and crime. The persistence of this circumstance some 20 years after a formal peace agreement (the 1998 Belfast

Agreement) has therefore increasingly asked questions of how youth work practice can evolve to address the potential for harm, to both victims and perpetrators.

1.2 'Tackling Paramilitarism' in Northern Ireland and youth work

Violent extremism has been part of political landscape of Northern Ireland for decades, drawing on deeply-rooted traditions of resistance and community defence that predate the language of violent extremism by decades and even centuries. However, for almost 30 years after 1969, violence by organised and armed groups became normalised in the sense that it was part of the everyday reality of Northern Ireland life with a distinct and persistent relationship with social and economic marginalisation, age and gender. Overwhelmingly, direct participation in violent conflict was dominated by young males from districts with evidence of persistent multiple deprivation in the age group identified by the UN as 'young people' (15–29). However, there was a degree of political toleration across the whole community for violence exercised for political purposes, and the definition of such violence as either 'criminal' or 'extreme' was contested.

By 1998, it was acknowledged by the governments of both the UK and Ireland that violence could not be eliminated by counter-security measures alone. Instead, the governments sponsored a comprehensive political approach, which bore fruit in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement of 1998. The Agreement directly addressed the question of violence and organisational continuity, explicitly denying any further formal or informal political legitimacy for violence and committing all signatories to 'explicitly peaceful and democratic means' for the resolution of disputes. In addition, the Agreement established an international process for the disarmament and disbandment of all paramilitary groups and for the early release of prisoners eschewing political violence.

In practice, this has turned out to be a politically and practically fraught, contentious and difficult task. The Agreement itself was not universally accepted as the final word on political division in Northern Ireland. Irish Republican Army (IRA) disarmament was verified after a decade of tortuous international negotiations, and only then was it possible to establish a devolved power-sharing system of government for Northern

Ireland and a Policing Board endorsed by all political parties. However, although much reduced, and despite political consensus, violence by armed groups has continued to be a reality at community level in some areas. On the republican side, groups opposed to the peace process (dissident republicans) continued to claim legitimacy to attack police officers, and other security personnel remained under explicit threat. Among loyalists, there was ongoing evidence of recruitment, local activity and participation in intimidation, rioting and other public order activities. Instability in the power-sharing Executive resulted in many periods of uncertainty and tension, requiring inter-party talks and intervention from the governments of the UK and Ireland. Added to this, organisations have continued to have alleged involvement in criminal behaviour, including attacks on young people or others accused of anti-social behaviour and forced eviction of people from their homes. In September 2015, the Executive was effectively suspended following the shooting of Kevin McGuigan in Belfast, allegedly by an element of the Provisional IRA. As the IRA had been officially disbanded in 2007, a new spotlight was turned on the failure to end the culture of paramilitarism in communities across Northern Ireland.

The 'Tackling Paramilitarism' programme emerged from the inter-party 'Fresh Start' Agreement, which took place as a result of these events. Critically, and uniquely, the programme received the full endorsement of political parties across the Executive prior to the three-year collapse of the Northern Ireland political system in January 2017. The risks for and by young people were included as one of 42 measures of the programme. Under Measure A4, the Education Authority placed an Outreach Worker in each of the eight most vulnerable 'Communities in Transition' across Northern Ireland, with a view to preventing young people from joining paramilitary organisations. According to the Executive Action Plan that accompanied the programme: 'The Outreach Workers aim to build relationships with young people who do not currently engage with the youth services and who could be considered as being at higher risk of involvement in paramilitary activity; they deliver programmes and support that develop the young people's resilience and awareness of risk factors.'

In practice, the principles of Resolution 2250 were never explicitly referred to in any of the interviews or focus groups associated with this research project, although their influence can be inferred from the approach of workers to the programme. Without exception, however, our

respondents were consistent in believing that youth work was only one aspect of a wider programme to address paramilitary activity, culture and organisation in Northern Ireland. In particular, youth work could not be regarded as an extension of policing, except in the widest sense of upholding basic rights and non-violence while providing guidance, encouragement and support for young people in making better choices. In all cases, youth workers had developed a very clear but subtle understanding of their professional demands and the nature of professional accountability, especially in relation to their position as ‘adults of trust’ for young people in tense relationships with their communities and/or with the police and the wider criminal justice system.

In interviews carried out for this research project (see Part 2) this approach was evident:

‘If you look at young people alone on their own, it does not work. You have to look at the whole community to understand where their young people fit.’

‘We – youth workers – need to develop and learn a new language with young people that explains to them our safeguarding role and engagement with the police but still make clear that we are not touts. This is all about trust. Youth workers need to have the trust of the young people and the police and that is very challenging.’

The establishment of a group of youth workers within the Tackling Paramilitarism programme also focused attention on the nature and scope of good practice. This research was designed to better understand the role and nature of effective youth work in relation to young people at risk of engagement with armed groups, whether as victims or members, identifying both opportunities for change and persistent risks while also identifying the core elements of good practice. The work was divided into two parts: a desk-based review of a number of relevant international intervention programmes; and a second element of fieldwork, where researchers interviewed a number of youth workers and other stakeholders, with each group having had direct experience and knowledge of engaging with paramilitary-related issues.

1.3 Methodology

The research was conducted between June 2019 and January 2020 and involved a mixed-methods approach. Initially, the team completed a literature review that documented 13 international examples of youth work designed to reduce the impact of violence on young people involved with armed groups, impacted by armed groups or potentially attracted to armed groups.

The second phase involved the completion of 16 semi-structured interviews and two focus groups. Interviewees were identified for their expertise in working with young people at risk from involvement in paramilitarism in Northern Ireland. In each case, the respondents were asked to reflect on the current landscape and the future risks to the security of Northern Ireland.

For reasons of confidentiality, it is not possible to identify the participants; however, the interviewees included youth workers directly employed under the Fresh Start programme, youth workers managing the programme, community activists with a personal knowledge of communities and paramilitarism, members of youth organisations and others with long-standing experience of youth work policy and practice.

The focus groups were arranged with the support of Corrymeela and involved a range of people from various backgrounds in youth work.

Confidentiality was critical to the viability of this project, and the research team has taken care to ensure that no material is attributed to a particular individual or organisation. The remainder of this report is structured around two parts, which provide a review of the international literature and a review of the Northern Irish context. This is followed by a critical assessment of the study and a number of observations.

2. Young people, ‘gangs’ and the ‘radicalisation’ process: A review of theory and practice

The first part of this report examines models of practice established to engage young people, outside Northern Ireland, who are engaged in violence. It has three subsections. Section 1 summarises some of the theoretical and philosophical debates within the academic literature on young people, ‘gangs’ and ‘radicalisation’. This section is further subdivided into two parts, given the differences in the more historical work on the social dynamics of youth ‘gangs’ and the much more recent focus within the context of the ‘War on Terror’, in which the concept of ‘radicalisation’ has been used to understand the processes that impact on ‘vulnerable’ young people requiring protection and safeguarding.

Section 2 is a report on 13 case studies from around the world (including the UK and Ireland, the USA and northern Europe), highlighting work¹ that tends to focus either on *prevention* (preventing young people from joining ‘gangs’ or being ‘radicalised’ in the first place), or *intervention* and *desistance* (reducing recidivism, providing support to leave the structures of gangs/armed groups or attempts to ‘de-radicalise’ them). This distinction between prevention and intervention/desistance is an important one to make in terms of developing projects that are clear in what they are attempting to achieve – a clarity of purpose that will reduce conceptual confusion (for youth workers and young people) and increase the effectiveness of work.

The 13 examples have been chosen to provide a representative overview of work in differing countries and contexts working on prevention and/or desistance with young people; however, these examples should be viewed as merely illustrative (rather than exhaustive) of the range of work that is taking place.² There are numerous other examples of youth programmes working in a similar thematic area, which either have

¹ These are mostly community-led youth programmes, but also draw upon two statutory examples by way of comparison (the CHANNEL mentoring programme which is part of the PREVENT strand of the UK CONTEST counter-terror strategy and the J-ARC programme to reduce recidivism amongst offenders in Dublin). Also included is the Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV) model in Glasgow; this approach is led by the Strathclyde Police, but with community involvement.

² For example, the CHANNEL mentoring programme has been included for comparative and informational purposes rather than as one of best practice, as it has been heavily criticised on several fronts. These issues will be discussed in section 2.

limited information publicly available in relation to them (perhaps due to the sensitivities of the subject area),³ or that have very little information in relation to the outcomes of the project. The examples that have been selected have, therefore, been chosen on the basis that there is requisite information available and also, in some cases, potential lessons (both positive and negative) that could be learnt for similar work in a Northern Irish context.

Section 3 concludes the review of the literature and practice outside Northern Ireland by identifying nine emerging themes of best practice arising from the case studies.

2.1: Young people, ‘gangs’ and ‘radicalisation’: A review of the literature

‘Gang’ research in a Western context can be traced directly to the work of Frederick Thrasher and Herbert Asbury in 1920s Chicago and New York, respectively (see Fraser, 2017).⁴ Thrasher (1927) argued that ‘gangs’ were not inherently a negative phenomenon; rather, they were an association of young male peers in highly populated areas where there was little in the way of amenities or facilities.⁵ While violence and conflict could (and did) emerge in ‘gang’ activity, this was not the *raison d’être* of joining a ‘gang’ for young people; primarily, it was to provide a sense of purpose and identity amidst the social dislocation they felt as a result of their disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (see also Shaw and McKay, 1942). This focus on the sociology of deviance and dislocation from society was built upon in several studies post-WWII, most notably by Alfred Cohen (1955). Cohen suggested that the class context and the formation of oppositional identities (rich/poor, haves/have nots) was crucial to the development of youth gangs in developing inner-city areas. Building on this work in a UK context, Stan Cohen (1972) later famously referred to the societal ‘moral panic’ relating to the activities of the ‘Mods’ and ‘Rockers’ in 1960s England, suggesting that the

³ For example, there is limited public information in relation to documenting the work of community funded projects engaging with young people as part of the PREVENT strand of the UK Government’s CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy.

⁴ Throughout this section, ‘gangs’ and ‘radicalisation’ are referred to in inverted commas. This is to reflect the fact that both terms are heavily contested within the academic literature. They can both be used pejoratively to negatively label young people, and there is also no single definition of either term.

⁵ Boys and young men are more likely to join ‘gangs’ and be involved in criminal activities than are girls and women (Messerschmidt, 1997).

government, media and public in general all overplayed the violent tendencies of young people in these 'gangs'. Young people in these two youth subcultures were perceived to be 'delinquent' by the adult generation primarily because they dressed differently, listened to different music and prioritised different values than did previous generations (ibid.).

Although seminal studies, the works of Thrasher and the two Cohens have been critiqued on the grounds that they present a rather 'idealised' presentation of 'gang' life, which tends to downplay or minimise the role of criminality and violence in sustaining the 'gang' as a collective (see Fraser, 2017).⁶ Indeed, the research focus on 'gangs' from the 1960s onwards shifted from sociological approaches to the field of criminology. Criminologists began considering both the social significance of youth 'gangs' to their members *as well as* the criminal activities with which they may be engaged (ibid.). 'Gangs' were increasingly associated with territory, crime and violence (Densley, 2013). In this vein, and after a wide-ranging consultation with youth and community workers, police, criminal justice agency representatives and young 'gang' members themselves, Miller (1975: 121) defined a 'gang' as:

*A self-formed association of peers, bound together by mutual interests, with identifiable leadership, well-developed lines of authority, and other organisational features, who act in concert to achieve a specific purpose or purposes which generally include the conduct of illegal activity and control over a particular territory, facility, or type of enterprise.*⁷

Yablonsky (1962) distinguished between social, delinquent and violent 'gangs', with violent 'gangs' drawing their membership primarily from '*emotionally disturbed youths*' (ibid.: 21). This would suggest that there is not a simple dichotomy between 'perpetrator' and 'victim' in terms of 'gang' membership; and recent research suggests that young members of 'gangs' themselves tend to have very challenging personal, familial and social circumstances. In their review of ten years of fieldwork on the issue in the UK, McAra and McVie (2010) found that persistent and

⁶ In a UK context, Scott (1956) and Downes (1966) have also been accused of understating the links between gangs and crime.

⁷ More recently, the Eurogang academic research network has similarly defined a gang as '*any durable, street-orientated youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of their group identity*' (van Gemert, 2005: 148). In the UK, under the Serious Crime Act 2015, 'gangs' have been defined as referring to '*more than 3 people*'; and which have characteristics that allow the members to be identified by others as a distinct group (see Fraser, 2017).

serious offenders of 'gang' violence were more likely themselves to be victims of violence and engage in other harmful or risky behaviours such as self-harm, drug use and regular alcohol consumption.⁸

Contemporary work on young people and 'gangs' suggests that they still tend to form in areas of 'advanced marginality', that is, spaces where there is a limited state presence and economic marginalisation, and where isolating social conditions are more pronounced (Wacquant, 2007). In such contexts, 'gangs' may come to constitute an alternative form of social order to the police and the state. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that under these conditions, 'gang' members are more likely to be involved in serious and violent 'delinquency' than non-members (Thornberry et al., 2003; Bennett and Holloway, 2004). Yet, the evidence would suggest that the links between membership, criminality and violence are complex, with identities for young members shifting in differing contexts between 'gang member'/'non-gang member' and conventional/criminal activity (Medina et al., 2013; Weaver, 2015).

While it is clear that 'gangs' exist across differing countries and contexts, what is not clear is the actual extent or scale of the 'problem' and how many young people are involved. Although there are challenges (both ethical and practical) in relying upon self-reported data from 'gang' members themselves to estimate the scale of the issue, official data on 'gangs' and their membership are also notoriously unreliable (Rennison and Melde, 2009; Fraser, 2017). In 2012, there was estimated to be more than 30,000 gangs with 850,000 members in the US (Egley et al., 2014). In the same year, the London Metropolitan Police Service identified approximately 260 violent youth 'gangs' in the city while Greater Manchester Police suggested there were more than 60 street gangs in Manchester, with almost 900 members (House of Commons, 2015). Outdated records and limited intelligence on the internal structure of 'gangs' (Katz, 2003), and at times the 'racial profiling' of non-affiliated young men from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds (Bjerregaard, 2003; Williams, 2015), suggest that such statistics cannot necessarily be relied upon. Yet, they are often utilised by statutory agencies to highlight a 'growing problem' in terms of youth 'gang' violence.

⁸ For the context in the US and the links between social exclusion, structural inequality, trauma and crime, see Thornberry et al. (2003).

This was most visibly manifest in 2011 with the publication by the UK government of *Ending Gangs and Youth Violence: A Cross-Government Report* in the aftermath of the riots in August 2011 in England. The report suggested that:

Gangs and serious youth violence are the product of the high levels of social breakdown and disadvantage found in the communities in which they thrive, but they are also a key driver of that breakdown (HM Government, 2011a: 4).⁹

Other than the more general critique of the report for the pejorative and negative labelling of young people generally with criminality (Shute and Medina, 2014), there is a great deal of complexity in the causal link that is implied in the connection between ‘gangs’ and violent crime: do (young) people engage in criminality and violence because they become part of a ‘gang’? In other words, is it the structure of the ‘gang’ itself that drives crime and violence, or do those who are more predisposed to criminality and violence join ‘gangs’? In which case, are acts of violence and criminality more related to the personal motivations and dispositions of individual members than the dynamics of the group?

If social issues are indeed at the core of why young people join ‘gangs’, then, logically, dealing with issues of inequality and social exclusion will help young people to either not join ‘gangs’ in the first place or to leave them. This ‘penal welfarist’ (Garland, 2001) approach, based upon the principles of rehabilitation and social support, formed the basis of much of the approach to ‘gangs’ in a US and UK context until the last three decades, when a focus on retributive justice in order to fight crime emerged (Fraser, 2017).¹⁰ At the core of such punitive approaches is the view that ‘gang’ members (regardless of age) are rational agents, who make a choice to engage in criminal activities as a result of weighing up the ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ in a cost-benefit analysis (Fraser, 2017).¹¹

⁹ This is very different language from that used by the Labour government in its 2008 Youth Crime Action Plan, which made little mention of youth ‘gangs’ and noted that ‘...only a minority of young people are actively engaged in serious crime’ (HM Government, 2008; see also Fraser, 2017: 203).

¹⁰ Although it has generally been acknowledged that imprisonment played a key role in making ‘gang’ structures more permanent in the USA (see Skarbek, 2014).

¹¹ A focus on a law and order response, with some secondary welfarist policies, is promoted by the Centre for Social Justice (2018). The organisation is chaired by former Conservative Party leader, Iain Duncan Smith.

While such a position seemingly runs counter to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the age of criminal responsibility and the ‘Beijing Rules’ (which focus upon diversionary activity, the avoidance of criminalisation and decisions that are made in the best interests of the child), the increasing globalisation of polices towards ‘gangs’ has led to countries such as the UK adopting those more punitive approaches that have dominated the approach to ‘gangs’ in the US (Ralphs and Smithson, 2015; see also Cottrell-Boyce, 2013).¹² While the approach to ‘gangs’ in the US has tended to focus on **prevention, intervention** (including street and outreach work) and **suppression** (Fraser, 2017) – the use of suppression and policing tactics – have been increasingly prevalent (ibid.).

However, alternative models of dealing with youth ‘gang’ violence have developed, even within the US context. One such model is the Cincinnati Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV),¹³ which is a violence-reduction and problem-orientated policing approach to ‘gangs’ that prioritises partnership and multi-agency working alongside deterrence strategies that focus on a small number of young people most actively involved in ‘gangs’. Such approaches are often based upon ‘the call in’, whereby young ‘gang’ members are asked to attend a public meeting and sign a ‘no violence’ contract/pledge, which then allows them to access various health, social, educational and employment support services and resources – providing they ‘hold up their end of the bargain’ (Fraser, 2017). Such an approach frames violence as a **‘public health issue’**, which can be tackled by statutory agencies and the community working together. A contemporary example of the CIRV model in Glasgow will be discussed in section 2.

¹² The doctrine of ‘joint enterprise’, used in the US, has been introduced in recent years to the UK and is intended to attribute guilt in assistance towards a common criminal purpose (Fraser, 2017). Thus far, it has been used disproportionately against BAME young people (see Williams and Clarke, 2016), and its use has been limited by the Supreme Court in the UK. Civil ‘gang’ injunctions have also been introduced in the UK under the Policing and Crime Act 2009. This legislation states that an injunction can be used if the defendant has engaged in, encouraged or assisted any ‘gang-related violence’, and the policy was extended to include 14–17-year-olds in England and Wales under the Crime and Security Act 2010 (Fraser, 2017).

¹³ Based upon the work of Professor David Kennedy. This model has also been used in Chicago, Indianapolis, London and Glasgow.

The discussion thus far has focused on the role of young people in ‘gangs’ – but what of the role of young people in armed groups that use violence in a more overt manner? The UN-led *Children in Organised Armed Violence Project* (COAV) found that there were similar reasons as to why some children and young people join an armed group in differing countries and contexts. These themes were similar to the reasons for joining ‘gangs’: marginalisation; living in areas of high population density with a poor quality of life; a young age profile of the local community; low levels of education; and high levels of unemployment (Dowdney, 2007). In such settings, armed groups may:

Offer disfranchised youth a fast-track to some form of social, political or economic inclusion or belonging, however limited, and ... offer excitement and entertainment in places where there is often little else to do (ibid.: 11).

The concern with the involvement of children and young people in violence relates not only to criminal activity in ‘gangs’, or even those wars and civil conflicts where ‘child-soldiers’ have been utilised; such concerns have become increasingly significant in the last decade within the policy context of the ‘War on Terror’. The emergence of the concept of ‘radicalisation’ and the focus on preventing young people from joining extremist and ‘terrorist’ movements has been placed front and centre stage, in both policy and practice.

2.2 Young people and ‘radicalisation’

Although the term ‘radicalisation’ is now common parlance and associated with violence, it has only been popularised relatively recently in the discourse and context of the ‘War on Terror’ (Coolsaet, 2019). Historically, to be a ‘radical’ was not necessarily perceived to be a negative development, nor was it necessarily associated with violence (Bartlett and Miller, 2012). It was often associated with critical thinking, which had the capacity to improve the ‘human condition’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944). It is within the last 15 years that there has been a distinct shift in how the terms ‘radical’ and ‘radicalisation’ are used. The 2005 EU document *Terrorist recruitment: Addressing the factors contributing to violent radicalization* has been credited with introducing the term ‘radicalisation’ into the lexicon (Hörnqvist and Flyghed, 2012). The mass

media and politicians in various Western European countries adopted the term as it seeped into wider public discourse in the aftermath of the ‘terror’ attacks in Madrid in March 2004 and London in July 2005, and the murder of Dutch film-maker Theo Van Gogh by an ‘Islamic extremist’ (Sedgwick, 2010).

The use of ‘radicalisation’ now, however, commonly refers to those willing to use (or support) indiscriminate violence to further their wider political or religious agenda (Kundani, 2012).¹⁴ Irish psychologist John Horgan (2012) has suggested that the shift away from focusing upon ‘terrorism’ towards ‘radicalisation’ was as a result of the inability to produce a coherent psycho-pathological profile of the ‘terrorist’ (ibid.). This led, instead, to a switch from analysing *being* a ‘terrorist’ to how someone *becomes* one, in other words, how an individual becomes ‘radicalised’ (Horgan, 2008). This included a move away from focusing upon ‘acts of terror’ themselves to the *thoughts* and *ideas* that could lead to violence (Hörnqvist and Flyghed, 2012).

Most conceptualisations of ‘radicalisation’ suggest that it is ‘*a process of social and psychological change, which in some cases, can precede involvement in terrorism*’ (Braddock and Horgan, 2016: 385). This ‘process’ definition was adopted by the UK government and used in its definition of ‘radicalisation’. The June 2011 CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy (updated to its fourth edition in June 2018)¹⁵ states that ‘*Radicalisation refers to the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism*’ (HM Government, 2011b: 108). One of the benefits of conceptualising ‘radicalisation’ as a ‘process’ at a policy level is that it implies there are various incremental stages through which an individual is required to proceed before they become ‘fully radicalised’. Theoretically, at least, this means that there is the potential to intervene in someone’s life, typically when they are young, before their ‘radical’ ideas lead them to commit an act of ‘terrorism’.

¹⁴ Mark Sedgwick (2010: 480) notes that ‘radicalisation’ was hardly referred to by the UK print media prior to 2001; yet, press references to ‘radicalisation’ significantly increased from 2005 onwards (doubling between 2005 and 2006), peaking in usage in 2007.

¹⁵ CONTEST first emerged in 2003 and has been updated in 2006, 2011 and 2018.

However, the wider psychological literature queries this direct link between ideas and actions and suggests that ‘ideological radicalisation’ does not necessarily precede and lead to ‘behavioural radicalisation’ and taking part in violent acts (Bjørgero and Horgan, 2009; Horgan and Braddock, 2010). Instead of focusing upon the ‘de-radicalisation’ of belief systems, Horgan (2009) suggests that the focus should be upon encouraging disengagement from violence (see also Fink and Hearne, 2008; Schuurman and Bakker, 2016). An interesting practical example of prioritising disengagement rather than ‘de-radicalisation’ is the EXIT Sweden project, which works with young people seeking to leave neo-Nazi and far-right movements. This example will be discussed at greater length in section 2.

A further difficulty with the ‘process’ metaphor is that not only does it lack the empirical data to support such suppositions, but the focus of intervention tends to be at the individual and psychological level. This approach minimises the wider political, social and structural context in which ‘radicalisation’ occurs (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2011; Schmidt, 2014). Reducing the concept to focus purely upon the psychopathology of the individual ignores the potential for viewing ‘radicalisation’ as involving a collective inter-group conflict dynamic of ‘us’ against ‘them’ (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017), which in the Northern Ireland context appears particularly relevant.

In a UK context, the CONTEST ‘counter-terrorism’ policy contains four strands: Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare. The focus within ‘Prevent’ is upon the ‘pathway’ analogy of ‘radicalisation’ as a process and the aim is to stop ‘terrorism’, based on a ‘warped’ ideology or worldview, before it occurs (Heath-Kelly, 2017):

The stated objective of the counter-radicalisation assemblage is to anticipate threat and enable intervention at the earliest possible stage. In particular, the knowledge practices that cast radicalisation as a social process or continuum suggest the possibility of early identification and intervention in the lifeworlds of potential future radicals (De Goede and Simon, 2013: 317).

The focus on Islamic extremism, and on Muslim young people in particular, within the Prevent strand has led to accusations that the policy is creating a new ‘suspect community’ in the UK that has been disproportionately impacted upon by ‘racial profiling’, in a policing and security

context (Hillyard, 1993; Hickman et al., 2012; Choudhury, 2017). As part of the pre-emptive ‘counter-radicalisation’ efforts in the UK, the CHANNEL programme was established in 2007 to provide targeted interventions (including mentoring) for those ‘vulnerable’ individuals who are displaying signs of being ‘radicalised’ (Sukarieh and Tannock, 2015: 25). The very young age at which some young people are referred to the initiative (some under 12 years old) has, however, been called into question (Coppock and McGovern, 2014; Elshimi, 2015).¹⁶ The CHANNEL mentoring programme will be considered further in section 2.

In England and Wales, the Counter Terrorism and Security Act (2015) places a legal duty on all public bodies to *“have “due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”*” (Choudhury, 2017: 239). This places a statutory requirement on health professionals, social workers, teachers, university staff, youth workers and others to report individuals to the authorities in those cases in which they believe the individual to be ‘vulnerable’ to ‘radicalisation’ (Spalek and Davies, 2012).¹⁷

A number of guides and risk-assessment matrices (nominal scales or checklist menus, such as the VERA 2 assessment scale used in the UK), have been produced to assist front-line practitioners spot the signs of ‘radicalisation’ (Klausen et al., 2016: 69–90; Sarma, 2017: 281). Typically, the more ‘risk factors’ that are ticked off on the list, the more ‘at risk’ the young person is to being ‘radicalised’ (Herrington and Roberts, 2012). Aside from the ethical issues inherent in the *‘enlistment of the professions into functions of intelligence gathering’* (Ragazzi, 2017: 172; see also Stanley and Guru, 2015; Sewell and Hulusi, 2016), which is presented as no different from other forms of managing risk and child safeguarding

¹⁶ Elshimi (2015: 121) notes that: *‘Of the 1,120 individuals identified by CHANNEL between 2007 and 2010, 290 were under 16 years, and 55 were under 12 years (HO 2011, 59). Therefore, a high proportion of individuals identified by CHANNEL was below the age of 16 years, with some being under 12 years. Ultimately, the CHANNEL programme, which makes de-radicalisation interventions possible, strongly exemplifies the workings of disciplinary technology in the technology of the self.’* Similarly, Coppock (2014, p.118) states that: *‘The UK Home Office (Her Majesty’s Government, 2013) reports that in the five years from 2007 to 2012, 2,500 individuals were referred to CHANNEL project practitioners for ‘support’. Of these, over 500 were young people; 290 were under 16 years old and 55 were under 12 years old. Over 90% were Muslim. It has been reported that school students have been referred through CHANNEL after making strong pro-Palestinian statements.’*

¹⁷ The introduction of the legislation seems to have impacted upon the number of referrals to ‘counter-radicalisation’ programmes such as CHANNEL. Indeed, in the first year after the legislation came into effect in July 2015, the number of overall referrals to CHANNEL increased by 75% (to 4,611), while referrals from school staff more than doubled (from 537 to 1,121; see Choudhury, 2017: 239).

(de Goede and Simon, 2013; O'Donnell, 2016), these measurement tools have been critiqued on a number of fronts. Such checklist approaches tend to lack empirical evidence supporting why they focus upon various 'risk factors' in particular¹⁸ (Sarma, 2017). They also require staff with very little knowledge or training in relation to 'radicalisation' to make subjective judgements, shaped by a lack of knowledge or stereotypical views of minority ethnic communities (Coppock, 2014; Coppock and McGovern, 2014; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2015; Jerome and Elwick, 2019).¹⁹

Despite numerous criticisms, the UK counter-terrorism strategy has been very influential in the development of similar strategies in other countries (such as the US, which launched a 'Countering Violent Extremism' strategy in 2011; see Klausen et al., 2016). The BRAVE (Building Resilience Against Violent Extremism) model of 'counter-radicalisation' in the US promotes the 'public health' approach to 'risk' and 'vulnerability' (referred to previously in relation to 'gangs'), which focuses upon building 'resilience' to 'radicalisation', in particular by supporting families to provide 'protective networks' for their children who may be 'vulnerable' to 'radicalisation' (Weine et al., 2009, 2016; Weine, 2012; Aly et al., 2014; Mirahmadi, 2016). One of the projects of the St Giles Trust is based upon this BRAVE Model, albeit in an English context, and will be discussed further in section 2.

It is important to bear in mind that while the terminology and concepts behind the work on young people and 'gangs' and 'radicalisation' may tend to have a different level of focus – the former tending to prioritise the social context and conditions for joining and the latter tending to focus on the violent ideology/ideas of the individual – engagement with young people in both a 'gangs' and a 'terrorism' context ultimately seeks to achieve the same ends: to prevent young people from joining them (prevention); or to support them to leave the life behind

¹⁸ However, some pupils taking a family holiday home to visit family members in countries such as Pakistan or Afghanistan have been referred for intervention in case they attended 'terror training' camps (see Coppock and McGovern, 2014).

¹⁹ Coppock and McGovern (2014: 249) note in relation to a guide produced for the Department of Education in England: *'In Learning Together to Be Safe: A toolkit to contribute to the prevention of violent extremism (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2008), teachers are given advice on "what can make a young person susceptible to adopting extremist views and supporting violence", as follows: "may begin with a search for answers to questions about identity, faith and belonging; may be driven by the desire for 'adventure' and excitement; may be driven by a desire to enhance the self-esteem of the individual".'*

(desistance). There are currently a number of innovative approaches within both the 'gang-related' and 'radicalisation' paradigms that are seeking to do just that. It is to an analysis of these case studies that this report now turns.

2.3 Comparing models of youth work intervention

Project details	Key themes	Programme and activities	Outcomes?
<p>STREET: (Strategy to Reach, Empower, and Educate Teenagers)</p> <p>‘Counter-radicalisation’ programme led by local community Salafists.</p> <p>Brixton, South London</p> <p>Funded by Home Office. The project came to an end in mid-2011 when the new British coalition government changed strategy within the counter-terrorism policy (and decided not to fund groups</p>	<p>Focus on PREVENTION</p> <p>Community-led</p> <p>The uniqueness of STREET was that it was a community-led initiative by local Salafists²⁰ in Brixton – with many staff and STREET mentors being from the local community or themselves Muslim converts, like those they worked with.</p> <p>Who is engaged?</p> <p>Young people (predominantly Afro-Caribbean community aged 15–25) ‘at risk’ of engaging in ‘anti-social behaviour, ‘gang’ violence, or ‘terrorism’. Many young people came from backgrounds where violence, emotional or physical abuse, low self-esteem, isolation and low aspirations were common.</p>	<p>STREET undertook a detailed risk-assessment of a person’s background and potential ‘vulnerabilities’. STREET developed its assessment framework for those ‘at risk’ of engaging in violent extremism. Staff were expected to have ‘core competencies’ in at least three of five ‘influencer factors’:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional well-being; • Social exclusion and estrangement; • Perceived grievance and injustice; • Foreign policy; • Religious extremist ideology. <p>STREET staff used the assessment to highlight the strength of influencer factors vis-à-vis protective factors and tailor interventions accordingly. If</p>	<p>Evaluation by Jack Barclay from the Centre on Global Counter-Terrorism Cooperation found that interviewees from the statutory sector (including the police) and also academics who had engaged with the project believed the impact to be overwhelmingly positive.</p> <p>The evaluation found the following important success factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An existing background in countering violent extremism protects credibility with the local community against claims by ‘spoilers’ of a ‘government front’; • Operational independence from statutory partners helped maintain credibility; • Educated, dedicated and knowledgeable staff with the

²⁰ A conservative theological branch within Sunni Islam which is promoted by the governing regime in Saudi Arabia. As Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010: 895) note: ‘Salafism is distinct from other Islamic religious orientations. It is based, in its essence, on a belief that Islam must return to its two key sources—the Qur’an and the Hadith—and reorientate their faith, belief and practice in order to be like the ‘Companions of the Prophets’. To this extent, Salafis (sic) perceive any form of religious tradition outside the immediate textual boundaries of these sources as deviations from those tenets mandated by God through his Prophet, Muhammad.’

<p>with conservative moral and world beliefs, such as the Salafists, who may have ‘street-cred’ with young disaffected Muslims).</p> <p>STREET maintained ‘operational independence’ from the state, while developing terms of engagement with organisations such as politicians and the Youth Offender Service. Information would not necessarily be shared with the other partners unless deemed necessary.</p>	<p>Purpose and approach: <i>‘For you, by people like you.’</i></p> <p>STREET staff and mentors challenge Islamic extremism ‘on the street’ by adopting a response tailored to individual young persons’ needs including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emotional well-being (counselling); • help with employment or training; • personal development; • faith-based work to <i>‘motivate personal reform and encourage positive citizenship’</i>, to provide a more grounded and textual understanding of particular Islamic teachings on issues such as citizenship. 	<p>required, STREET staff drew on a stronger theological intervention called the <i>Deconstruct</i> programme – which aimed to highlight how al-Qa’ida and others use videos and the internet to ‘distort the truth’ and put out their message, regardless of its veracity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging influences and decision-making that may cause someone to legitimate violence; • Improving confidence and self-belief, increasing resistance to negative influences; • Providing a ‘safe space’ for young people to debate problems and issues bothering them, and address feelings of disempowerment and marginalisation; • Unlocking ‘social capital’ of individuals through educational and vocational training. 	<p>ability to challenge particular narratives;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robust methodological rigour in risk assessment process; • Addressing wider issues in relation to ‘radicalisation’ is important – including poverty, educational attainment, mental health and addiction.
<p>CHANNEL: Part of the PREVENT strand of the CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy.</p> <p>First piloted in 2007 and extended across</p>	<p>Focus on PREVENTION (safeguarding)</p> <p>Multi-agency approach</p> <p>Established as govt policy/legislation:</p> <p>Counter-Terrorism and Security Act made ‘spotting the signs’ of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After referral, a ‘CHANNEL panel’ is convened (monthly), chaired by the local authority and attended by education, social services and health care representatives. 	<p>Impact assessment has proved difficult as CHANNEL focuses on the pre-criminal space, at the level of ideas before ‘terrorism’ or violent behaviour occurs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2017/18, of the 7,318

<p>England and Wales in April 2012.</p> <p>Participation became a statutory duty for local authorities in England and Wales under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015.</p>	<p>‘radicalisation’ a statutory requirement for all local authorities in England and Wales.</p> <p>Referrals for CHANNEL come from: police, social services, medical professionals (including GPs and dentists), youth workers, teachers, university staff and social workers. Education bodies now account for more referrals to PREVENT than any other sector (35% in 2017/18).</p> <p>Training sessions and handbooks are available for statutory staff to assist them to spot the signs of ‘radicalisation’ at an early stage, predominantly amongst young people.</p> <p>Who is engaged?</p> <p>CHANNEL is primarily focused on those who have yet to commit a criminal act, but who it is thought may <i>potentially</i> do so.</p> <p>Aimed at those deemed ‘vulnerable’ to ‘radicalisation’ to safeguard those ‘at risk’ of being drawn into any form of extremism or ‘terrorism’ (including Islamic or right-wing ‘terrorism’).</p> <p>In 2017/18, 62% of the 1,314 referrals were 20 years of age or younger and 86%</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each referral is discussed, and a suitable ‘package of support’ agreed. • If identified ‘vulnerabilities’ are not ‘terror-related’, then the person is referred to existing mainstream support services (mental health, counselling, addiction, etc.). <p>Participation in CHANNEL is voluntary (if the person is under 18, parental or guardian consent must be gained) and is supposed to be confidential.</p> <p>Varying types of support are available for those referred to the CHANNEL programme. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health service support; • Educational and employment support; • One-to-one ideological or theological mentoring from a CHANNEL Intervention Provider. 	<p>referrals made to PREVENT, 18% (1,314) were discussed at an inter-statutory CHANNEL panel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70% of those referred to CHANNEL were deemed not to require specific intervention. • 30% (394) received support through the programme, 76% of whom have now left the programme (298). <p>The programme has been politically contentious.</p> <p>The focus on the thoughts and ideas of people who have yet to commit a criminal act, but who it is thought may <i>potentially</i> do so (rather than being judged on behaviour) has been widely criticised as the state overstepping its remit in terms of an Orwellian surveillance of citizens prior to them committing any actual offence.</p> <p>Guidelines have been critiqued as ‘unscientific’, based on prejudice and assumptions, and encouraging front-line staff to ‘see risk’ where there may be none.</p> <p>A Behavioural Insights Team report (2018) found that more than 95% of 33</p>
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	<p>were male.</p> <p>Purpose and approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify individuals ‘at risk’; • Assess the nature and extent of the ‘risk’; • Develop an appropriate individual support plan. 		<p>‘de-radicalisation’ schemes associated with PREVENT as a counter-terror strategy were ineffective or failing. Only two programmes were found to be effective.</p>
<p>Aasha Gang Mediation Project: A project coordinated by Osmani Trust in Tower Hamlets (UK) between 2003–2016. Project aimed to support local young people ‘vulnerable’ to joining a gang. Tower Hamlets has been a focal point of the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) fund of PREVENT. Only Bradford and Birmingham received more ‘anti-terror’ and ‘de-radicalisation’ funding.</p>	<p>Focus on PREVENTION</p> <p>Community-led</p> <p>Who is engaged?</p> <p>Focus on changing the ideas of young people to (hopefully) alter later behaviour.</p> <p>Purpose and approach</p> <p>Peer-to-peer engagement model to reduce territorially associated violence and criminality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accredited training; • Diversion: Excursions to highlight alternative activities to ‘gang’ culture; • One-to-one mentoring and personal development; • Street outreach; 	<p>In 2015/16 Aasha:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reached out to 270 local young people in a variety of activities (109 of whom were under 19 years of age); • 88 young people were recruited as peer-to-peer mentors; • 25 young people were in nationally-recognised accredited training; • 21 workshops on ‘gangs’, drugs and anti-social behaviour were delivered; • Two community events challenging ‘gang-culture’ were held (attended by 340 people from the local community); • Aasha staff mediated in 12 	<p>A relatively small (24) internal evaluation based on self-reported change identified progress in a number of areas (2016).</p> <p>An external evaluation (2011) found that the Osmani Trust had built up relationships with young people within the community over years before trying to deliver what was perceived by some as a controversial programme (PREVENT) directed towards their community (Muslims).</p> <p>Even with prior work, a strong local base, and ‘cultural competence’ to deal with identity, faith and violence, it took time to build relationships to deal with sensitive issues associated with the counter-terrorism strategy.</p> <p>The external evaluation found that the project had more impact on young</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gang mediation in times of crisis or violence. <p>De-glamorisation using positive role models from the local community, and in particular, young people who were former 'gang' members but who had ultimately changed their lifestyle for the better.</p>	gang-related incidents.	<p>people by focusing upon issues such as education, promoting volunteering and civic engagement than the initial narrower remit focused on challenging faith-based extremism. The evaluation concluded that this was driven by local priorities, which found that Islamic radicalisation was a less important as a risk factor for young people than other vulnerabilities and concluded:</p> <p><i>'Compared to that of the funder, this may represent a slightly different model of what 'violent extremism' is and how it should be addressed.'</i></p>
<p>EXIT Sweden:</p> <p>Established in 1998 in Stockholm to work with people (predominantly young men) seeking to leave the neo-Nazi and far-right subculture.</p> <p>Based on the premise that young people join white supremacist movements from personal and social circumstances –</p>	<p>Focus on DESISTENCE</p> <p>Voluntary-led/police cooperation</p> <p>EXIT Sweden is part of Fryshuset (YMCA network), funded primarily by grants from the Swedish government.</p> <p>Who is engaged?</p> <p>People (mostly young men) seeking to leave the neo-Nazi and far-right subculture.</p> <p>Referrals are taken purely on a voluntary, self-referral basis. Trust is crucial. Most staff are former members of far-right groups, and have been through a similar process. Engagement</p>	<p>Assessment is made on a 'violent extremism' spectrum ranging from -10 (most extreme) to +10 (most positive). Staff apply the scale based on many factors – social connectedness, levels of tolerance, (power) relations with others, willingness to use violence, social skills, etc. This numerical spectrum is used to tailor interventions. To deal with someone at the -10 end will require a staff member who has also been at that level of extremism. Different staff are used at differing times in the intervention and mentoring process, depending on where the young person is, at that</p>	<p>Since 1998, EXIT Sweden has worked with 800 individuals, helping them leave far-right groups. There is no publicly available data on recidivism levels for participants in EXIT Sweden, but since the year 2000, recidivism levels of participants in the EXIT Germany programme are estimated to be as low as 3%.</p>

<p>feeling excluded from society or disconnected to others – rather than inherent belief in ideology.</p> <p>Joining far-right groups is associated with a search for identity, status and power.</p>	<p>with clients can last from several months to several years.</p> <p>Purpose and approach:</p> <p>EXIT Sweden supports clients to build a new social identity for themselves, in which their former worldview/ ideology will no longer ‘make sense’.</p> <p>Crucial to the engagement in both projects have been qualified staff who themselves have personal experience of the issues with which they are working.</p> <p>The main method is to train participants to meet new people and handle new relationships and situations that are different to when they were in the white power movement, which in turn makes them less dependent on their former need for power and control. Gradually, an extremist worldview stops making sense.</p> <p>EXIT Sweden uses therapeutic dialogue, mentoring schemes and other activities to support clients to develop alternative worldviews, self-understanding and internally critique the identity they have ascribed to themselves.</p>	<p>particular time.</p> <p>The programme includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal meetings and a contact person (initially available at all times, if needed); • Assistance to liaise with government agencies (housing, social services, probation, police, etc.); • Support for family and friends; • Counselling, managing conflict sessions and psychotherapy to clients as well as parents, siblings, partners and others; • Social activities (sports, music, etc.) and training to encourage participants to carve out a new social identity for themselves away from negative peer group; • Help with educational/ vocational training and finding a job; • Practical assistance with the removal of far-right tattoos and emblems. 	
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<p>‘Mechelen model’: founded on the principles and values of inclusion.</p> <p>Mechelen is a city in Belgium (Flanders). A large proportion of Mechelen’s immigrant population were born in Belgium of Moroccan descent and often experienced a struggle to balance the differing cultures and experiences.</p> <p>These difficulties were exacerbated by populist (and at times xenophobic) reaction to immigrant communities following the ‘terrorist’ attacks in Paris and Brussels.</p>	<p>Focus on PREVENTION</p> <p>Local authority-led</p> <p>Who is engaged? Integration of whole city</p> <p>Purpose and approach: The problem of ‘radicalisation’ was re-conceptualised as marginalisation. Mechelen acknowledged that socio-economic conditions of deprivation, social exclusion and a lack of opportunities were cultivating conditions that enabled groups such as Sharia4Belgium to ‘radicalise’ and exploit young people:</p> <p><i>‘We don’t need more police or special laws. The first thing to do is have an inclusive policy at the local level, you need to create security in your city, don’t allow neighbourhoods to be without services, with criminals as role models. In many cities people don’t live with each other but next to each other, in archipelagos of monocultural societies.’</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety – application of the law is critical to prevent the creation of a vacuum. Responsibility does not, however, fall just to law enforcement agencies or the criminal justice system. In Mechelen, an ‘<i>Older Brothers Programme</i>’ operates during summer months and holiday periods, with young interns being appointed to work in their communities to tell other young people to observe social and civic responsibility. This creates leadership and mentoring skills in interns and may make them more actively think about societal norms and behaviour; • Develop a new narrative of diversity that all citizens can input into or connect with. • Avoid group-think that results in further demarcation in societal groups rather than promoting engagement and inclusion; • Counteract segregation in society, e.g. in schools; • Appreciate the ever-changing 	<p>When compared with the neighbouring town of Vilvoorde, the impact of the ‘Mechelen model’ is stark. Vilvoorde is half the size of Mechelen but has been a source of 28 jihadis connected with the outlawed Islamist group Sharia4Belgium. The Mayor of Mechelen estimated that but for the implementation of the ‘Mechelen model’, 25 residents would have left to join jihad in Syria or Iraq based on the regional average.</p>
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		<p>dynamics of towns and cities;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss common values that underpin society as a bridging tool between individuals; • Combat Wahabist propaganda. 	
<p>Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV): was established in Glasgow in 2008 by the Violence Reduction Unit, managed and led by the Strathclyde Police.</p> <p>The aims of the mentoring aspect of the CIRV project were to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce offending (including anti-social behaviour) rates; • Encourage participants to consider 	<p>Focus on DESISTENCE</p> <p>Police-led</p> <p>Who is engaged? 129 street ‘gang’ members were invited to a public meeting (held at Glasgow Sheriff Court) – and told that <i>‘The violence must stop’</i>. Voluntary follow-up meetings were held with non-police staff from the programme (usually ‘on the street’). Participants were asked to sign a written pledge that they would desist from ‘gang’ activity. Within the parameters of law, collective responsibility was expected from ‘gangs’ – if one ‘gang’ member broke the non-violence agreement, the entire ‘gang’ was in violation.</p> <p>Purpose and approach:</p> <p>‘Focused deterrence strategy’ promoted by the Boston Ceasefire project and the Cincinnati Initiative to Reduce Violence. Adopted a ‘public health approach’ (like</p>	<p>Three core components to CIRV:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The moral voice of the community. • Enforcement – disrupting the activities of gangs via intelligence gathering; ‘gang’ violence analysis; and group targeted enforcement. • Services and programmes: <p>Courses and training offered to young (predominantly male) ‘gang’ members including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal development; • Employability; • Mentoring; • Intensive support; • Diversionary activities (including sport). <p>A full-time four-week course (Tackling Gang Violence Programme) for ‘gang’</p>	<p>Interim two-year evaluation found that the CIRV model had contributed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A 46% reduction in violent offending by participating ‘gang’ members; • A 34% reduction in all other types of crimes and offences by participating ‘gang’ members; • ‘Gang’ fighting was reduced by approximately 73% and weapon possession reduced by 85%; • Violent offending for the most ‘at risk’ members reduced by 56% (and offending amongst this cohort for other offences reduced by 34%); • Participants who engaged with intensive mentoring reduced their violent activity by 73% and their criminal behaviour by 62%; • CIRV clients on average reduced

<p>victim issues;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce negative peer association; • Improve self-esteem; • Help support parents and carers; • Support access to education; • Reduce alcohol and drug use. 	<p>illness, violence is ‘preventable’) to coordinate existing work, which had tended to work independently – in the belief that uncoordinated responses focused on enforcement had previously ‘failed’.</p> <p>Takes a partnership approach including the police, social services, education, housing and community safety, alongside the local community.</p>	<p>members involved in high levels of violence. The course deliberately includes members from differing ‘gangs’, ‘forcing’ them to meet and engage in dialogue. Using sports (including martial arts) from trained instructors (some of whom are former ‘gang’ members), course content included sessions on territorialism and the impact of ‘gang’ violence on the local community, anti-knife crime awareness, drug and alcohol awareness, motivational workshops, employment registration and a ‘career essentials’ programme, workshops on visualisation, affirmation and emotional intelligence and conflict resolution workshops and team-building activities.</p> <p>Following graduation – and if they had not reoffended during the period – young participants proceeded to a four-week ‘Employability’ programme’.</p> <p>A mentoring service, provided by the <i>Includem</i> charity was a core component of the wrap-around services provided. This one-to-one mentoring support (by referral) took place with those ‘gang’ members deemed to be the ‘highest risk’ and those who have tended not to engage with other services provided</p>	<p>their violence levels by approximately 22% more than those ‘gang’ members who did not participate.</p> <p>The results of the final evaluation (Williams et al., 2014), using before and after analysis alongside a non-participating comparison group, found that for the 167 young men (aged 16–29) who engaged in the research for between one and up to two years following their participation in CIRV:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violent offending reduced by 52% for CIRV participants compared to 29% for non-participating ‘gang’ members; • The rate of physical violence was not overtly different between CIRV and non-CIRV ‘gang’ members even after participation; • But the rate of weapons carrying reduced by 84% for CIRV participants compared to 40% for non-participants.
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		<p>within the CIRV partnership.</p> <p>A 'Training of Trainers' component was delivered to over 80 staff of partner organisations (as well as ex-'gang' members), to enable them to work with young 'gang' members in the future and ensure sustainability.</p> <p>Other aspects of the programme included the CIRV East End Football League, and an Impact Youth programme for under 16s to improve health, lifestyle choices and reduce anti-social behaviour.</p>							
<p>Fight for Peace: Founded by Luke Dowdney in Rio de Janeiro in 2000 and opened another base in Newham, East London in 2007.</p> <p>Utilises boxing and martial arts, alongside education and personal development. The programme specifically aims to work in disadvantaged areas,</p>	<p>Focus on BOTH PREVENTION AND DESISTENCE</p> <p>Voluntary organisation</p> <p>Personal approach</p> <p>Who is engaged? Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to 'realise their full potential'.</p> <p>Purpose and approach:</p> <p>Fight for Peace draws on a 'public health' model to violence prevention and focuses on three core areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting the socio-economic inclusion of those affected by 	<p>Five pillars:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boxing and martial arts: A 'hook' to encourage young people to join the programme. The sports are also used to encourage discipline, self-control and promote more positive levels of self-esteem; Education: Educational opportunities for young people marginalised or 'failing' in mainstream education or who are not attending school; Employability: Training and vocational courses and 	<p>In 2018, 1,256 young people took part in the evaluation in Rio and 727 took part in London (see Fight for Peace, 2018):</p> <p>Data for London (%):</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1619 978 1912 1385"> <tr> <td>Less likely to carry a weapon</td> <td>80</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Less likely to commit a crime</td> <td>87</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Less likely to be part of a gang</td> <td>80</td> </tr> </table>	Less likely to carry a weapon	80	Less likely to commit a crime	87	Less likely to be part of a gang	80
Less likely to carry a weapon	80								
Less likely to commit a crime	87								
Less likely to be part of a gang	80								

<p>which are disproportionately impacted by crime and violence.</p> <p>The 'Theory of Change' of the programme is based on the assumption that <i>'a young person's behaviour, situation and the choices they make, are dependent on the way they see themselves, how they relate to others, and how they see their future'</i>.</p>	<p>crime and violence;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting those young people identified as being 'at risk' of engaging in crime and violence; • Supporting young people to disengage from crime and violence and help their efforts not to reoffend. 	<p>opportunities to engage with potential employers (particularly in the private sector);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support services: Includes mentoring, medical and legal referrals, home visits and community outreach; • Youth leadership: Young participants are encouraged into leadership roles to promote 'active citizenship' by becoming members of the Youth Council, which liaises on the organisation's behalf with external organisations. 	<p>In Rio in 2018, 410 young people gained job interviews through employment support and 42 young people gained employment.</p> <p>Data is taken from Fight for Peace and is not independent. An external evaluation (peer-reviewed as part of Project Oracle 2013) of the Rio and London projects found that the programme was 'highly successful'. This external evaluation also found that the organisation encouraged reflection and adaptive practice amongst both young people and staff.</p> <p>Fight for Peace Alliance has trained more than 160 organisations across 25 countries.</p>
<p>St Giles Trust: Works to resettle and reintegrate offenders on release from prison in Camberwell, London.</p> <p>The project operates on a peer-to-peer basis to train and assist newly released offenders, working with 3,000 offenders</p>	<p>DESISTENCE (SoS) and PREVENTION (SoS+)</p> <p>Voluntary organisation</p> <p>Who is engaged?</p> <p>SOS offers intensive help to young people exposed to or at the risk of being a victim of violence, 'vulnerability' or exploitation.</p> <p>The SOS+ programme focuses on preventing young people from becoming</p>	<p>SOS+</p> <p>The course is delivered by trained professionals with direct, personal, lived experience of the issues they are speaking about. The project aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debunk myths and stereotypes around the 'glamorous' lifestyle associated with 'gangs', crime, weapons and to challenge social media by exposing the realities of negative lifestyle choices; 	<p>In 2017/18: 517 people were trained as Peer Advisors; 4,793 were helped to find a permanent home; 795 clients were helped to find paid work; an economic analysis found an £8.34 saving for every £1 invested in peer-led services through the St Giles Trust.</p> <p>The Social Innovation Partnership (TSIP) evaluation into the SOS project in 2012/13 found:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 87% of client interviewees said

<p>in the last ten years. The project makes contact with prison leavers four weeks prior to their release. Peer Advisors assess each client, identify their needs, draw up an agreed action plan of support and liaise with agencies both within the prison and in the community.</p> <p>With specific reference to young people and 'gang' involvement, St Giles Trust operates two programmes: SOS and SOS+.</p>	<p>involved in 'gangs' through a series of interactive sessions in schools, pupil referral units and colleges that provide practical tools on how to stay clear of 'gangs', violence and crime.</p> <p>Purpose and approach: SOS</p> <p>Selected, trained individuals of comparable backgrounds to the young people utilise their personal and professional experience to relate to, support and mentor 'at-risk' young people. 'County Lines', which offers flexible support for young people drawn into supplying and dealing drugs through or on behalf of 'gangs'. The focus is to support the young person to reconnect with family and positive support networks away from drugs, crime, 'gang' involvement and exploitation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impart tools and strategies to young people so that they can resist negative peer pressure and 'grooming' from 'gangs'; • Encourage young people to stay in education and positive activities. <p>Each course is tailored to the individual needs of each group, and modules include topics such as: knife crime; the realities of prison; sexual exploitation; and the impact on victims.</p>	<p>that engaging with the SOS project changed their attitude to offending;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 73% said it was important that caseworkers were ex-offenders; • 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the SOS project helps clients to stop or reduce reoffending. <p>County Lines Demonstration Project</p> <p>Independent research by JH Consulting (2019) found:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 38 children and their families were provided with one-to-one support, with 35 remaining engaged with the project at the end of Sept 2018. Of those, 11 (31%) children successfully exited County Lines activity; 19 (54%) children were deemed to be at decreased risk; • Kent Police reported that 50% of children experienced a reduction in reported crime (either as victim or suspect) and missing episodes across the cohort have halved.
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<p>J-ARC: began in November 2014 in Dublin</p> <p>Started with a joint protocol between An Garda Síochána, the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service and aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and further strengthen a multi-agency approach to the management of crime; • Prioritise offenders to develop initiatives to address their offending behaviour; • Reduce crime and increase public safety in local communities. 	<p>Focus on DESISTENCE</p> <p>Statutory-led</p> <p>Who is engaged?</p> <p>ACER3: Working with 20 people (involved in burglary) around Tallaght and Kevin Street Stations (May 2015–December 2016).</p> <p>Change Works: Engaged with 50 ‘priority’ individuals in the first quarter of 2015 and a further 50 in the second quarter.</p> <p>STRIVE: Worked with 18 ‘prolific’ offenders around East Ballymun (January 2015–December 2015, and July 2016–December 2016).</p> <p>Unlike the CIRV model, participants did not have to consent to participation but were selected after proposal by the Gardai (ACER3) or Probation Board (Change Works) or all three partner agencies (STRIVE) and encouraged to ‘buy in’ to each pilot programme. Within the STRIVE pilot in particular, community agencies played an important role alongside statutory agencies in terms of support for project participants.</p> <p>What is the approach?</p>	<p>A core component behind all three pilot programmes is for personal plans for access to support – participants are expected to adhere to plans (e.g. attending the Job Centre). If they do not follow action plans, then there is the prospect of return to custody.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACER3: Three of the 20 (15%) offenders did not reoffend during the observation period, while nine had partially desisted (45%). There was also a reduction by 37% in burglaries by participants. Burglary offences in and around the two train stations reduced by 40% during the intervention period. However, ten participants were returned to prison; • Change Works: 37% of participants (19 of 51) did not reoffend. 31% (16) of participants who reoffended were returned to prison. 18 (35%) participants were deemed to have completed all aspects of their personal action plan and completed the programme; • STRIVE: 28% (five of 18 participants) did not reoffend. There was a reduction by 43% (35 fewer) in offences by participants. There was a 57% reduction in arson offences in the geographical area during
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	<p>Three two-year pilot programmes in Dublin:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACER3: Local drug treatment services as well as employment organisations were also involved; • Change Works: Focus was on those engaged in violent and harmful behaviour. The Bridge Project was involved alongside J-ARC partners; • STRIVE: The Ballymun Social Regeneration Sub-Committee, the Job Centre, DSP, DCC and Local Drugs Taskforce also involved with J-ARC partner agencies. 		<p>this time, while drug offences reduced by approximately 30% (see JARC, 2018).</p> <p>As the general recidivism rate in the Republic of Ireland in 2018 was estimated at 58% (JARC, 2018: 29), the review of the external evaluations suggested that the early findings of the programme were ‘promising’. However, the evaluators acknowledged challenges with the evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No baseline data; • No randomised control group used for comparative purposes; • Difficulties in comparing across the three pilots; • Small sample sizes (only around 90 individuals were involved with the three J-ARC pilots at any one time).
<p>ROCA: Interventionist youth work model in Massachusetts since 1988 and later in Baltimore.</p>	<p>FOCUS ON BOTH PREVENTION AND DESISTENCE</p> <p>Community-led</p> <p>Who is engaged?</p> <p>Targets young men who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are aged 17–24 years old; 	<p>Four-stage approach:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A ‘relentless’ outreach approach that involves members of ROCA confronting young people within their community, with whom other youth programmes have been unable to work, by 	<p>ROCA uses a ‘Social Solutions, Outcomes’ data collection method and tracking on a weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual basis to chart participant progress and staff performance. The data collected includes capturing every effort made to contact a young person as well as time</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have been previously arrested; • Have prior incarceration; • Are ‘gang-’ or ‘street-involved’; • Use or deal ‘drugs’; • Have a prior juvenile probation and/or a prior adult probation; • Have dropped out of school. <p>Purpose and approach:</p> <p>The motto of ROCA is <i>‘less jail: more future’</i>.</p> <p>ROCA’s vision is to disrupt the expected cycle of incarceration and poverty by helping young people transform their lives. Their work is underpinned by an organisational theory that when young people are engaged by positive and intensive relationships, they can change their behaviours and their lives.</p>	<p>knocking on doors, meeting them at school and ‘persisting with them’ until they agree to participate in the programme.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. A transformational relationship approach tending towards a <u>restorative approach</u> in which obligations and responsibilities are attached, not only to the young person, but also the ROCA youth worker, on a 24/7 contact basis. 3. A focus on three core areas: education; life skills; and employment. 4. Engagement with external organisations that impact on the lives of high-risk young people. ROCA adopts a ‘relentless outreach’ approach in demanding that external organisations engage with themselves and the young people involved with the programme. 	<p>logged by a young person engaged in programming, a risk/needs assessment, the progress of the transformational relationship between each youth worker and a young person, and overall programme and staff evaluation.</p> <p>In 2018, ROCA engaged with 942 ‘high-risk’ young men. Of these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 88% were not arrested again after engagement in ROCA; • 298 (32%) were in transitional employment; • 267 (28%) were placed in a job; • 78% stayed with ROCA; • 66% held jobs for over six months.
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<p>GREAT (Gang Resistance, Education and Training): an evidence-based ‘gang’ and violence prevention programme built around school-based law enforcement curricula, which began in 1991 in Phoenix, Arizona (USA). The police department was tasked to develop a ‘gang’ prevention pilot in schools.</p>	<p>Focus on PREVENTION</p> <p>Police/school-led</p> <p>Who is engaged?</p> <p>Targeted primarily at children and young people aged just below what is considered to be the prime ages for induction into ‘gangs’.</p> <p>Purpose and approach:</p> <p>The programme was designed to reduce ‘gang’ activity by educating young people on how to resist pressure to join ‘gangs’ by having trained, uniformed police officers teach life skills to students. A typical programme includes 13 ‘middle-school’ lessons, a six-lesson elementary-school curriculum, a summer component and a family component.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Elementary school component:</u> Designed for students aged 8–10 years old with a focus on introducing students to GREAT skills and concepts. The programme is delivered by specially trained and uniformed police officers. The programme is structured so that the 30–45-minute lessons run consecutively with no more than two-week gaps. At the end of each lesson, a letter detailing what the purpose of the lesson was, is sent home to parents. Themes include violence prevention, staying safe, effective communication, anger management, respect and citizenship. • <u>Middle school component:</u> Targeted at young people attending ‘middle-school’ (aged 11–16). Training is delivered by uniformed police officers. Themes include the relationship between crime, violence, drug abuse and ‘gangs’, beliefs about ‘gangs’ and violence, roles and responsibilities in their family, 	<p>Since GREAT was established, more than 13,000 police officers have been trained to teach the curricula to over six million children and young people. Having trained 1,859 law enforcement officers and delivered curricula to more than 500,000 middle school students, a University of Nebraska Omaha evaluation of the programme in 1995 found that it was not clearly demonstrating that it was meeting its goals for reducing ‘gang’ activity and membership.</p> <p>A second evaluation by the National Institute for Justice (review period 2006–2012) focused on students who had received the modified curriculum, in order to assess whether the redesigned programme would ensure the project aims were being met. The evaluation concluded:</p> <p><i>‘Our multicomponent evaluation found that the G.R.E.A.T. program [sic] is implemented as it is intended and has the intended program effects on youth gang membership and on a number of risk factors and social skills thought to be associated with gang membership. Results one-year</i></p>
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		<p>school and communities, personal goals, decision-making skills, effective communication skills, active-listening skills, effective refusal skills, anger-management skills, conflict and violence prevention, and conflict-resolution techniques.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i><u>Families component:</u></i> A six-session family strengthening programme in which parents and their children are engaged in group activities and facilitated group discussions. The curriculum includes an exploration of violence, family roles in safe and healthy communities, improving family relationships, communication skills, clear, consistent rules, limits and the role of effective discipline and monitoring, addressing bullying and internet safety for families. • <i><u>Summer component:</u></i> The summer component complements school-based components. The aims are to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on school-based 	<p><i>post-program showed a 39% reduction in odds of gang joining among students who received the program compared to those who did not and an average of 24% reduction in odds of gang joining across the four years post-program.'</i></p> <p>From a school perspective, surveys of teachers and school administrators found that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 91% of teachers and administrators support having law enforcement in schools; • 94% of administrators and 87% of teachers support having GREAT in their schools; • 100% of administrators and 83% of teachers say that GREAT addresses problems facing their students; • 88% of administrators and 80% of teachers agree that GREAT teaches students the skills needed to avoid 'gangs' and violence. <p>In contrast to those who did not take part in the programme, the evaluation</p>
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		<p>curricula and reinforce goals by offering young people an opportunity to enhance their skills;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen law enforcement’s relationship with the community; • Provide positive alternatives to ‘gang’ involvement; • Improve public/community relations; • Provide structured activities when students are not in school. 	<p>revealed that GREAT students demonstrated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More-positive attitudes toward police; • Less-positive attitudes about ‘gangs’; • More use of refusal skills (saying ‘No’); • Higher collective efficacy (and research correlates higher collective efficacy with lower crime rates in neighbourhoods); • Less use of hitting neutralisations; • Less anger; • Lower rates of ‘gang’ membership; • Higher levels of altruism; • Less risk-seeking.
<p>BUILD (Broader Urban Involvement and Leadership Development): BUILD has been operating in Chicago since 1969, with the explicit focus</p>	<p>FOCUS ON BOTH PREVENTION AND DESISTENCE</p> <p>Community-led</p> <p>BUILD provides counselling, mentoring, community education and work-readiness training.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention Programme – a ten-week in-school course aimed at preventing young people from engaging in drug use and ‘gang’ life; • Intervention Programme – 	<p>BUILD’s annual report states:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3,765 young people were directly served by BUILD programmes; • 87% of youth reduced negative or risky behaviour;

<p><i>'to engage at-risk youth in schools and on the streets to help them realize their potential and contribute to our communities'.</i></p> <p>Violence Intervention Curriculum is designed to help young people in detention centres overcome challenges, issues and problems that they may face in their communities, specifically relating to 'gangs', crime and violence.</p>	<p>Note</p> <p>\$2,000 annual cost per youth for BUILD intensive mentoring compared with \$187,765 annual cost per youth for incarceration in Illinois.</p>	<p>solicits 'gang' members from the street to participate in recreational activities and offers drug abuse education, referrals to medical specialists, and counselling. BUILD's 'Peace Leagues' bring together ex-'gang' members, police and young people to develop positive alternatives to 'gang' life. Intensive mentoring provides at-risk young people with the support and opportunities to move away from 'gang' involvement;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Resource Development Programme – involves adults who volunteer to develop mentoring relationships with 'gang' members and to create strong community bonds and disrupt 'gang' development; • Rehabilitation Programme – intervenes with adjudicated youth in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Centre to reduce recidivism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85% of youth improved conflict resolution skills; • 98% of BUILD's youth were promoted to the next grade; • 96% of BUILD's high-school seniors applied for post-secondary education; • 93% of eligible BUILD youth received a job or internship; • 96% of BUILD's high-school seniors earned a diploma; • 72% of justice-involved youth do not reoffend – the state-wide average being 40%.
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<p>Homeboy Industries: Established in East LA in 1988 to try and improve the lives of former ‘gang’ members. It is the largest ‘gang’ intervention, rehab and re-entry programme in the world.</p>	<p>Focus on DESISTENCE</p> <p>Community-led</p> <p>Who is engaged? Formerly gang-involved and previously incarcerated men and women. Each year over 10,000 former ‘gang’ members from across Los Angeles come to Homeboy Industries.</p> <p>Purpose and approach: The five principal objectives of Homeboy Industries are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce recidivism; • Reduce substance abuse; • Improve social connectedness; • Improve housing safety and stability; • Reunify families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tattoo removal • Workforce development: Employment specialists assist clients in discovering skills, gaining new skills/qualifications, interview preparation and identifying job opportunities. • Solar panel training: Developing marketable skills. • Educational services: Over 40 classes each week including: life skills; substance abuse recovery; work readiness; arts and wellness; academic. • Mental health services: Professional therapists for one-to-one counselling. Additional support groups are also available and open to the public. • Domestic violence: A 52-week intervention programme. • Legal services: Legal professionals assist clients with any legal issues that may inhibit transition from ‘gang’ involvement. 	<p>The 2018 Annual Report for Homeboy Industries states:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7,712 received programme and service support; • 65% of Trainees reported arrests in the three months prior to joining Homeboy Industries – after joining Homeboy Industries, only 1% of Trainees reported arrests. • 24% of Trainees reported using hard drugs in the 30 days prior to joining Homeboy Industries – 2% of Trainees reported rarely or never using ‘hard drugs’ after joining Homeboy Industries. • 95% of Trainees reported at least weekly contact with supportive people since joining Homeboy Industries. • 80% of Trainees reported having reunified with their children since joining Homeboy Industries. • \$19,258 in fines and fees
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management: Clients engaged on Homeboy Industries' 18-month job training programme work with case managers to develop bespoke service plans. • Substance abuse: Support for clients who may use drugs and other substances. • Social enterprise: Current social enterprises include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeboy Silkscreen and Embroidery; • Homeboy Nationwide: Branded and licensed items for sale at grocery stores nationwide; • Homegirl Café and Homegirl Catering; • Homeboy Electronics Recycling; • Homeboy Bakery, HomeboyFoods.com and Homeboy Farmers' Market; • Homeboy Diner at City Hall. 	<p>removed for clients.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11,240 tattoo removals. • 26,398 classes were attended. • 32 students were enrolled in college for the first time. • 85 participants became college students. • 34 trainees gained a driver's licence. • 8 trainees obtained custody of their children; • 23 trainees were discharged from probation/parole.
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2.4 Summarising the approaches and methods

A summary of the approaches and methods adopted by the projects (see Table 1 below) shows that no single or consistent approach to intervention has yet emerged in relation to young people and involvement in group-based violence. However, from the table, it is possible to identify a number of patterns of priority.

- Five of the projects in this survey were directly led by the state or government agencies. In the case of CHANNEL, the policy had a high profile and was supported by all agencies of the state, from the police to schools to local government. Others, such as CIRV, were police coordinated and led. The majority of programmes were delivered by voluntary agencies, some in conjunction with broader state policies and others as independent projects.
- Projects with young people were directed at both preventing young people joining violent groups and at helping people leave.
- The overarching question of young people and group violence is divided between those with a clear ideological purpose (Islamist or far right), those directed at territorial gangs and those directed at people coming out of prison and becoming involved in gangs. Some of the projects were designed to address how people think, whereas others were entirely directed at preventing or stopping violent behaviour.
- Almost all of the projects that targeted individual people used personal mentors.
- Formal teaching was one element of all the projects, and the focus of the BUILD and GREAT projects.
- Connection to employment was central to the majority of projects.
- Sport was a vehicle for engagement in two of the projects.
- Counselling and support for well-being and personal health was a theme in the majority of projects.
- Changing the social environment was a conscious part of a number of programmes.

- Six of the 13 projects worked directly on matters of faith and ideology.
- Removing symbols such as tattoos was an explicit goal of two projects.
- One project was aimed at addressing primary-aged children and worked within schools.
- One project worked on the basis of an amnesty, where young people were presented with choices in relation to the style of policing to be adopted (CIRV).
- Other themes included direct personal development planning, inter-agency coordination and cooperation, mediation with gangs and groups, communities of support for young people, developing a new narrative at local level for inclusion, programmes for the training of trainers, drug treatment, legal services and support in cases of domestic violence.
- The slogan 'relentless outreach' was used directly by one project (ROCA). However, it characterised a number of other projects.

Table 1: Summary table of approaches and intervention methods adopted by all projects

Group	State/ NGO	P D	Target	Voluntary Participation	Personal Mentors	Formal Teaching	Work issues	Sport	Counselling/ Mental H	Diversion/ Social	Faith/ Ideology	Tattoos	Other Methods
STREET			Islamist youth										Personal development
CHANNEL			Radical- isation										Referrals Statutory obligation on councils
AASHA			Islamist youth										Gang mediation Positive role models Community events
EXIT			Far-right extremism										Support for friends and families
MECHELEN			Segregation										New narrative for the city
CIRV			Knife crime										Enforcement Training of trainers
FFP		PD	Youth at risk of crime										Youth leadership

													development
ST GILES		PD	Young people and gangs										County lines project
J-ARC			Young violent offenders										Drug treatment
ROCA		PD	Less jail, more future										Relentless outreach

GREAT			Young people and gangs										Curricular-based approach
BUILD		PD	At-risk youth										Peace League
HOMEBOY			People in gangs										Substance abuse Domestic violence Legal services

2.5 The 'fit' of international models to Northern Ireland?

Having completed a desk-based analysis of models of good practice for intervention with young people (either at risk of or actually engaging with violence elsewhere in the UK, Ireland, continental Europe and the US) some important similarities and differences were immediately apparent.

Although there is a clear common thread running through all of the international models of practice relating to the connection between young people and group-based violence, it is also apparent that the problem that each project is designed to address varies significantly in each case. No single project directly meets the challenges associated with paramilitarism, and translating the learning in external projects into the Northern Irish context must be done carefully.

Outside Northern Ireland, 'Gang' violence, even where a gang has local territorial dominance, is normally be treated as criminal without fear of creating wider political sympathy. On the other hand, neither Islamist groups not violent far-right groups have achieved territorial dominance or hegemony in any territory or neighbourhood in the West. Armed struggle in Northern Ireland, on the other hand, emerges from a deeply embedded and widely accepted ethnic and political narrative of hostility and aspiration, where armed violence has at various times been regarded as a legitimate tool or is tolerated as a fact of life by a high proportion of the surrounding community in some areas. The longevity of conflict in Northern Ireland since 1970 meant that armed and paramilitary groups became an integral part of the fabric of life of many localities for decades. Over time, paramilitary organisations and paramilitaries were a critical part of the internal community structure and the organisation of community life, embedded in families, cultural tradition, social control, the local economy and community development. Although the political conditions have altered substantially since 1998, paramilitary and armed groups claim symbolic continuity with this legacy of community-political legitimacy.

In some parts of Northern Ireland, widespread sympathy for 'armed struggle' on behalf of a community against its external enemies remains integral to community and spatial identity, reflected in public visual culture, annual celebration and historical remembering of events. In Belfast, tourism now celebrates the activity of paramilitary and armed organisations continue to be presented as historic indigenous instruments of defence or attack for the community against a common foe, part of 'us' against 'them'.

This creates an almost inevitable ambiguity between an informal and embedded narrative of (good) internal defenders against (bad) external attackers and a formal but essentially novel narrative pitting (good) state actors in opposition to (bad) internal criminals. While there is a long history in Northern Ireland of security initiatives and efforts to deter paramilitarism through politics and community initiatives, it has not yet been possible to assume what CIRV calls the 'moral voice of the community' with full effect, especially at local level. Is action against paramilitary and armed groups by the state in 2020 to be understood as an essential and positive action to uphold the rule of law or a heavy-handed external attack on communities by their foes. In the event of confrontation, who will be considered 'us' and who is 'them'? Tackling paramilitarism until now has been seen as the province of the external imposition of law. Changing the emphasis to reducing community tolerance for and cooperation with paramilitarism therefore involves a long and complex process of resolving embedded contradictions and transforming the everyday 'normal' patterns of community life in some places. It will not be eliminated by taking enforcement action against 'abnormal' behaviour without developing new patterns of community normality.

Uncertainty about political, administrative or community support in 'tackling paramilitarism' continues to mean that actively pursuing paramilitaries and paramilitarism is treated as an unacceptable personal or organisational risk by many state and voluntary agencies, and avoided. As a result, practice in relation to paramilitarism and armed groups in Northern Ireland remains informal and dependent on individuals more than fifty years after they reappeared in the post-Civil Rights era.

The survey of international projects suggests that the common thread is not found in the direct comparability of armed groups, but in the principles of youth work and their relationship to young people. The common professional task is the intentional extension of youth work

practice to include the protection of young people in communities from engagement in, or becoming the victims of, armed groups because it is a challenge to values and principles, rather than being responsible for a policy task of 'tackling paramilitarism'. However, in Northern Ireland this does entail acceptance that paramilitarism has a negative impact on young people, and that youth workers must be practical and proactive in response.

Taking this as a starting point, the international projects offered a number of important insights into good practice:

- Although the religious/theological aspect of STREET is not equivalent to the Northern Irish context, the fact that STREET staff were local and had 'street cred' amongst their young people was an important element in working with young people. The rigorous risk-assessment process undertaken by STREET staff, taking into account both risk and protective factors, and designing a person-centred approach was also evidence of important youth work values.
- Aasha's focus on a preventative approach to stopping young people illustrates the need to set efforts to tackle violent extremism within a wider commitment to the well-being of young people. The fact that the Aasha project worked most effectively when it focused on those issues impacting directly on young people on the fringes of 'gang' culture, including improving school attendance, educational attainment, raising their hopes and aspirations and encouraging them to consider their employment options moving forwards, suggests that a similar grounding in the lived experiences of young people in Northern Ireland will be a critical element of successful youth work.
- The learning outcomes of EPIC Sweden, captured in Wilchen's (2015) doctoral thesis, suggest a number of key actions:
 - Using the experience of staff of similar backgrounds to those with whom they work;
 - The value of self-referrals, and personal motivation to change;
 - The focus on the emotional and social underpinnings of extremism rather than ideology;
 - The importance of (re)establishing a support network around the (vulnerable) young person;

- Accessing wider youth and social support services for young people to ensure that the project is not isolated and takes place within a wider youth-work setting.
- Creating a connection to employment and wrap-around services was an important element of the Glasgow anti-knife crime experiment (CIRV), confirming a continuing connection between the attraction of armed groups and the provision of meaningful pathways for young people to a more secure future. This is despite the fact that CIRV may not translate directly into Northern Ireland where police leadership remains a sensitive issue, especially where the police are offering a choice between participation and a harsh clampdown, and where handing over weapons is a highly political issue, regulated by treaty.
- The principle of reconnecting young people to their communities is reproduced in the Fight for Peace project through its ‘five pillars’: sport, education, employability, support services and youth leadership. The use of sport as the initial hook to encourage engagement with young people emphasises the value of establishing confidence in relationships, as a pre-cursor to any wider exploration of ideology or beliefs.
- The ROCA model builds on a belief in the potential of transformational pro-social relationships to disrupt cycles of poverty, violence and criminality among young people (TEO, 2018a) by targetting a core demographic of young people (aged 17–24) at particular risk of becoming involved in ‘gangs’ and, incarceration and expected lives of criminality.
- The focus on transformational relationships is also shared within Homeboy Industries. Here, the emphasis is on the importance of re-establishing social connectedness and reducing social isolation as a way to provide a sense of purpose or identity (McAra and McVie, 2010), and to nurture an environment within which people can address all sorts of negative behaviours. These include substance misuse, barriers to employment and education, and the removal of symbols of ‘gang’ identity.

- Two of the projects have a specific focus on working with young people leaving prison as an at risk group. Having a criminal record can be a factor for young people either coming to the attention of the paramilitaries or joining a 'gang' or armed group for their own protection (Densley, 2013; Fraser, 2017). In Northern Ireland, 40 out of 41 young people released from custody in 2015/16 reoffended within one year (DOJ, 2018). The St Giles Trust's 'Through the Gates' programme provides support for people before, during and after their release from prison to enable re-entry back into a community. The results of the J-ARC programme for young offenders may also provide an intervention model to reduce recidivism for young offenders in Northern Ireland.
- Research has shown that some young people have a glamorised view of 'the Troubles', prison life and the role of paramilitaries in their community (TEO, 2018a; 2018b). The SOS programme/model might be adapted to challenge the perceptions and stereotypes that may result in young people joining 'gangs' or paramilitaries in search of what they believe represents a glamorous lifestyle.
- The emphasis within the GREAT programme on building the social skills and capacity for young people to resist and refuse paramilitary coercion could be helpful in a context of wider community support. The focus within BUILD on what happens outside of school also offers potential areas of exploration, requiring close inter-agency collaboration and community endorsement of the curriculum.

Paradoxically, given that Tackling Paramilitarism is a government-led programme, the most distinctive differences to Northern Ireland practice were in the two models led directly by public policy rather than youth workers. The 'Mechelen model' consciously reconceptualises the 'radicalisation' debate in terms of marginalisation and social exclusion and seeks to address the conditions that create a vacuum within communities that can be exploited by violent extremist groups. There is no doubt that the socio-economic, cultural and health conditions that impact young people in communities in Belgium have significant parallels in Northern Ireland. Importantly, the 'Mechelen model' suggests that youth-work intervention must be in a context of wider culture change. Responsibility is spread across all sections of society in recognising that long-term objectives of social inclusion can only be achieved through co-ordinated investment and cooperation.

Perhaps the most challenging model for youth workers in Northern Ireland is CHANNEL. Since 2015, there has been a statutory duty on local authorities in England and Wales with provision for teachers, doctors and youth workers to be trained to spot the signs of ‘radicalisation’ amongst young people with whom they work. Two aspects are striking from a Northern Ireland perspective: on the one hand, the ability of the state to act through a variety of means against identified radical groups without fear of community opposition is not directly transferrable. In Northern Ireland, elements of the state, especially policing, were unable to rely on broad co-operation in every community. Where the state did continue to operate including in social services, health, education and youth work, each service restricted its responsibility to upholding law within its direct area of service, rather than overtly supporting wider policing. Even since 1998, the police cannot fully rely on ‘presumed consent’ in all places at all times in either republican and loyalist dominated areas. Teachers, youth workers and professionals in many areas may not yet feel confident that they could extend information-sharing beyond existing boundaries without risking community confidence and their ability to deliver core services. Some would feel that it put the lives of staff into personal danger. Furthermore, many would feel that any effort to change the duty on professionals to report, would not end radicalisation but drive it deeper into the community and result in growing community resentment against all authorities. In other words, adopting a CHANNEL approach in Northern Ireland would provoke rather than prevent radicalisation.

2.6: Emergent themes from the international field

1. **Engagement must be specific to context:** While all of the case study examples are a response to criminal influence on young people, context matters to each of them. That context includes location, the social status of the individuals, the people engaged both as practitioners and young people and the political environment. Similar challenges and behaviours within a different social and political environment inevitably alters practice. Thus none of the examples can be treated as ‘best practice’ and transferred without qualification into the Northern Ireland context.

2. **Youth work must be person-centred:** All of the models in this study were targeted at addressing **individual needs rather than meeting security targets**. Change in youth work is not ‘forced’, but ‘chosen’ as young people are encouraged to take part in new social activities and develop new (and more positive) social networks, in which they are exposed to alternative worldviews. The projects themselves are a direct response to a desire to change negative influences on young people, ‘vulnerable’ to recruitment or victimhood. All of the intervention and prevention approaches were consciously targeted at the needs of the individuals at risk of ‘gang’ involvement or ‘radicalisation’.
3. **Youth work is relationship-based, and loses its capacity to influence young people without trust:** A common critical theme in the international projects dealing with desistance and ‘radicalisation’ is the reliance of youth work on building and fostering strong, sustainable **relationships of trust** with young people. Organisations directly involved in preventing (or countering) the ‘radicalisation’ of young people, such as the *Aasha Gang Mediation Project* and *EXIT Sweden*, emphasised the importance of **establishing relationships with the young people before a space is created for ideologies that need to be challenged**. Indeed, the value of youth work in relation to engagement with young people at risk of or engaged in violent or extreme behaviour depends almost entirely on the extent to which youth workers are considered trustworthy by young people. For that trust to be possible, youth workers must also command the trust of the sponsor and the host community. There is an inherent difficulty with top-down, state-driven approaches to grading ‘risk’, in which the state defines the risk and applies it to the young person or defines ‘need’ in relation to state criteria. In this study, this was particularly evident in the criticism of *CHANNEL* (O’Donnell, 2016; Hill, 2019). In Tackling Paramilitarism, the sponsor is the state. By engaging youth work, the state also engages the primacy of trust-building within youth work, and accepts clear distinctions with policing and security. By engaging with the state, youth workers also accept parameters, including commitments to safeguarding and the rule of law. In the context of the ambiguity around paramilitarism and the role of the state in Northern Ireland, however, real trust can only be developed through open public discussion about how trust is to be nurtured and grown. Compromising these values

prevents youth workers from doing their job with young people, by turning them into direct agents of security policy. Above all, there is a need to establish what element of practice is centrally determined, and what aspects rely largely on professional judgement.

4. **Successful youth work is a hub for re-connection, coordination and cooperation for the young person:** Youth work intervention is not a stand-alone activity. From the *STREET* community-led 'counter-radicalisation' programme in Brixton, South London to the *Homeboy Industries* project in Los Angeles, the youth work is predicated upon re-establishing **connectivity, coordination and cooperation** for marginalised young people who may have become isolated from mainstream society:

- In *Homeboy Industries*, this is achieved by reunifying families and improving social connectedness.
- The *BUILD* and *ROCA* projects (and also the *St Giles SOS* project) engage community members to establish mentoring and support relationships between the community and the young person.
- *CIRV*, in Glasgow, encourages partnership working and greater coordination between statutory agencies and the local community, to provide wrap-around support services for 'vulnerable' young 'gang' members.
- The Project Oracle Synthesis Study (McMahon, 2013: 4) concluded that such targeted, comprehensive, multi-agency programmes gave '*the strongest indication of an effect on young people's participation in gang activity and violence in London*'.²¹

This also includes signposting young people into professional support. Most of the projects surveyed (including the two statutory examples of *CHANNEL* and *J-ARC*) actively reconnect young people with **professional support services**, in a process of coordinated engagement to address underlying needs such as drugs and alcohol abuse, social isolation or mental health issues, and which may have contributed to criminogenic behaviour.

5. **Change requires critical self-reflection by young people, and intense, focused and acute work.** A consistent theme in the international examples is that change is possible when a previous worldview no longer makes sense under changed life conditions. Most of the

²¹ Project Oracle is a London-centric project aiming to generate an evidence base of evaluated youth services. The Project Oracle Evidence Hub emerged as a partnership between the Social Innovation Partnership and London Metropolitan University. In 2018, it joined with the Centre for Youth Impact.

projects believe that **targeted, continuous and sustained support and engagement** on the terms of the young person offers the only prospect of success. Young people will not necessarily be ready to engage or progress at the speed that the community or the projects themselves may seek to. Even where a young person disengages or falls away, they should not be abandoned.

- The *CIRV* project in Glasgow, itself borne from the ‘focused deterrence strategy’ of the Boston Ceasefire project, exemplifies the intense nature of approaches that balance harsh punishments with support for individuals seeking to move beyond ‘gang’ involvement.
- *ROCA* balances intense and ‘relentless’ direct engagement with young people with follow-up supportive elements designed to be transformational in building the capacity for the young person to transition from violence and criminal behaviour.

6. **Addressing underlying social issues is vital:** Almost all of the projects are aimed at the most at-risk, marginalised and ‘vulnerable’ young people in at-risk and marginalised communities. Many of the case studies draw directly on theories that suggest that change can only occur if it disrupts cycles of poverty, hopelessness, crime and incarceration. **Education or employment** are often seen as crucial in sustaining the transition of a young person away from negative influences. Not only does this approach form the backbone of a number of projects such as *Fight for Peace*, but it is an incentive to participate. Young ‘gang’ members participating in *CIRV* in Glasgow suggested that the main reason they chose to participate in the programme was the hope of securing a job.

7. **Community engagement is hugely valuable:** The value of community members alongside professionals in **mentoring** young people was another common theme of most of the case studies. By being able to speak with first-hand knowledge of having gone through similar situations with regard to ‘gang’ culture and expectations placed upon them, mentors are able to not only relate to young people but also to offer hope and inspiration that moving beyond ‘gang’ life is possible. This also opened up a pathway towards reconnection with the wider community:

- The *STREET*, *Aasha* and *BUILD* programmes highlighted the **role of former ‘gang’ members as critical in building relationships with young people.**
- Many *EXIT Sweden* staff are themselves former members of far-right groups.

In summary, the international projects suggest that good youth work to address violence must:

- **be locally relevant;**
- **be person-centred;**
- **build trust through relationships;**
- **reconnect young people to the community, services and healthy networks;**
- **be targeted, continuous and sustained;**
- **address real educational and employment deficits;**
- **work with community support.**

3. Tackling paramilitarism in Northern Ireland

International practice has resulted in numerous examples of good youth work practice with clear lessons for Northern Ireland. Like CHANNEL, the Tackling Paramilitarism programme has its roots in public policy. However, unlike CHANNEL, and as outlined above, the state has a different historical relationship with communities, organisations and people in Northern Ireland, shaped in particular by the political and peace process of the 1990s. In broad terms anti-radicalisation programmes presume that the radical element (whether Islamist or far right) is an abnormal and identifiable violent presence which does not represent the wider community, and can ultimately be isolated from it. In Northern Ireland, armed groups are woven into the community infrastructure in a way which cannot be eradicated by external pressure without community consent to change. Other work outside Northern Ireland especially with members of gangs has often involved voluntary initiatives committed to offering an alternative to criminal justice for young people. They are not necessarily intergrated into any wider frame of public policy. Voluntary leadership of this nature tends to produce exemplary projects without necessarily engageing systemic change.

This section of the report summarizes the outcomes of a series of interviews (17) and focus groups(2) with youth workers and others involved in community youth work in Northern Ireland, during which we explored their direct experience and practice as well as their approach and attitude to the work established within the Tackling Paramilitarism programme.

3.1 Defining paramilitarism in Northern Ireland

Building on the commitments of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, it can be inferred that the intended purpose of the Fresh Start is:

- to reinforce the commitment in the Agreement to removing legitimacy from all unlawful violence for any purpose - actual, intended or tolerated- and from any groups that use it
- to give operational meaning to that commitment through an active policy of stopping and preventing ongoing paramilitary activity;

- to treat any residual violence, and the groups perpetrating it, as entirely criminal
- to nurture and support the emergence of culture which has no ongoing armed activity, organisations or cultures.

In reality these relatively simple policy goals are being implemented in a context where the terminology that has emerged in Northern Ireland around paramilitarism is no longer precise, and may even add to confusion. While 'paramilitarism' and 'paramilitaries' are still referred to without qualification on a daily basis in politics, community and the media, closer scrutiny shows that the terms appear to be used interchangeably for what have become a variety of distinct concepts, inter alia;

- illegal terrorists in general,
- 'armed groups' engaged in a legitimate conflict before 1998 ,
- community leaders of standing and popular authority in some areas, consulted on major political changes,
- local 'gangs',
- organised crime operations,
- para-state operatives carrying out clandestine actions on behalf of the state, or even
- a specifically loyalist term whose nearest equivalent is *either* the provisional IRA, which formally disbanded in 2007 but who were accused of the killing of Kevin McGuigan in 2015, and/or anti-peace process republican dissidents.

It was clear in our interviews, that the nature, purpose and geographical scope of armed activity even between the areas designated under the programme ranged from the normalised 'extracurricular' activities of named individuals and specific activities to an informal but ever-present

and sinister coercive influence on community life, experienced as real or anticipated intimidation, decisive 'political' control and sway shaping power relations and free speech in communities. This was reflected by many of our respondents:

'Paramilitaries are either a gang or involved in community development, and there is conflict between the two.'

'In this area, people connected to paramilitarism are more forward thinking and trying to do things the right way. It comes down to personalities. I would hazard a guess in [other areas] that they have this siege mentality. They are using loyalism as a flag of convenience for criminality. They happen to be protestants living in a protestant area and use that to poison the kids.'

'We found the term 'paramilitary' is a difficult term to get your head around – because there are so many different layers. We would always say we would work with anyone and with anyone who has learned and turned the corner and is working for the common good. But there are others who are not working for the common good.'

'Then there is the word 'paramilitary', which is sometimes an issue of criminality. Some of the money which goes in to these groups is used to keep them quiet. But it gives them legitimacy – as hard to reach [people] who need to be brought to the table. But once they come to the table, it is impossible for anyone else to come to the table. Decent people have left. It is okay to work with them ... if it is the ones who have turned the corner.'

'People here do not make a connection between the death of Lyra McKee and getting a local 'guy' to give a beating to the kid that broke into your house.'

'What you also have, especially in the loyalist side, are these groups ... that claim to be the peaceful element of paramilitarism, but they all have an agenda about trying to legitimate the narrative around loyalist paramilitaries and be the good side of them.'

'So, one body is brought in to do work in place A. But they are the same organisation in place B. They are all branches of the same organisation doing work on each other's patches by agreement – they just look differently.'

'In reality, it's all very blurred and complicated – you have those aligned with the groups that are involved in crime and drugs and others who are more concerned about their legacy ... So, young people are growing up in this conflict; its everywhere to the point that it is normal to have these illegal institutions responsible for governance in communities, and this is another layer of complexities that young people have to navigate.'

As policy responses to each of these phenomena are necessarily different, 'tackling paramilitarism' may have become an unhelpful and even inaccurate tool for defining policy or action. In the interim, public debate about tackling paramilitarism too often consists of generalised soundbites, and appears to proceed from the presumption of shared meaning, without due regard for the complexity of the legacy of conflict in the shape of paramilitarism in communities in Northern Ireland.

'We are delivering in an ecosystem – quick answers haven't worked and won't work.'

'We are changing the trajectory of communities and people: that is usually not a short-term experience.'

3.2. The context of change

In this extremely complicated landscape for policy, politics and practitioners, rhetorical oversimplification of tackling paramilitarism carries significant risks. Some of the complex contextual issues evident from this research include:

- The language and ‘mental map’ of loyalist and republican respondents were clearly different. Whereas those in loyalist areas identified ‘paramilitarism’ within their communities, they also pointed out that the experience of what this meant at local level varied enormously, even where the same organisation was involved. Loyalists largely equated their role as community activists with mainstream Sinn Fein-supporting republicans, and indirectly with the provisional IRA and not with dissidents. Most republicans, on the other hand, did not associate paramilitarism with Sinn Fein-linked activity. The closest internal analogy of ‘paramilitarism’ for those working in republican dominated areas was with violent ‘dissident’ republicans. Even here the term paramilitary was seldom deployed:

‘The term ‘dissident republican’ covers a multitude of groups and people, and the blanket term does not help with those that are trying to dissuade people from being associated with these groups.’

‘The issues are similar in republican communities with the biggest issue the dissidents and the multiple splinters within that community. They – the dissident republicans – are always trying to circumvent the law-and-order argument. Also, the geography – the lack of space – means it is easier to recruit. You can control the environment.’

A number of respondents indicated that by using the language of paramilitarism, the programme is perceived by loyalists as targeting loyalist communities and exempting mainstream republicanism from change. Some loyalists express concern that community

organisation, which they perceive as coercive 'political' control of republican areas by mainstream republicans, is excluded from scrutiny. In their own defence, they point to the origins of the Fresh Start programmes in the activity of a part of the 'mainstream' IRA, which nonetheless exempts itself from consideration as 'paramilitary'. This apparently semantic issue has important consequences if it shapes not only expectations about who the targets for change within the programme are?, but what counts as success?, how it is to be measured? and who is considered a potential future partner?

- In some places in Northern Ireland, the interpenetration of 'armed groups and their culture' with local community development, local politics and political organisation, traditional cultural display and even with aspects of criminal justice appears to be almost organic, meaning that it may not be finally possible to distinguish between what 'is' and 'is not' paramilitary:

'Everybody from the local community knows who is connected within dissident republican groups – but nothing changes. What does that tell you?'

This is also locally variable: indeed in many other places in Northern Ireland armed groups have no meaningful presence. Where armed groups are embedded, some community, political, cultural and criminal justice interests may be, at best, ambivalent about actively upsetting this symbiosis, or at least those aspects which they see as positive, where they are associated with identity or where the change process would disrupt the pattern of community life.

- The experience and perception of armed groups is also strongly affected by a number of differences, including political allegiance, age and geography. Attitudes to paramilitarism shaped by very different local experience and by different generational experiences

inevitably shape attitudes to policy and to priorities for intervention. These differences impact directly on the language, content, methods and measurement of the programme. A single approach to intervention inevitably hits against this reality that the circumstances of communities differ:

'When you think of it, a lot of the work over the years has been consistent but contradictory. What works here will not work in other places. The principles are the same.'

'Obviously, in this particular area ... you still have the scaffolding of the conflict, which still wraps around communities today, evidenced by the continuing existence of the UDA, UVF, RHC – and on the republican side you see the splintered and fractured dissident groups.'

- The response of government, politics and the public sector to paramilitarism is widely believed to be 'two-faced': rhetoric in favour of tackling paramilitarism is seldom matched by action on the ground. Over a long period of time, the press has regularly carried allegations that former paramilitaries and alleged current paramilitaries hold visible positions of formal and informal authority and influence. Where these allegations are both denied and repeated but not investigated, many in the wider community are left unsettled and ambivalent.

This was reflected by some respondents who maintained that the police have at times developed pragmatic but consistent channels of engagement with some paramilitary-linked individuals and groups and a tacit acceptance of some aspects of paramilitary structures at local level, regarding them as constructive and supportive ordering elements acting to maintain confidence and order. At the same

time, few statutory organisations outside the police admit to engaging directly with paramilitarism at all, although we found that this is widely disputed in the community. Where the links between paramilitary organisations and community development, political leadership and cultural organisations or on justice issues are hard to distinguish at local level, agencies are inevitably faced with a dilemma. Thus numerous Interviewees commented on the ambiguous attitude to paramilitarism, armed groups and political connection by statutory agencies and funding agencies supporting community development, often for pragmatic as much as policy reasons:

'There was a major issue at local level and an effort to engage all parties. But that effort means that control of the policy moves to the groups which have caused the trouble. When a local resident complained about the implications of this control to a local elected rep, the elected rep went to the group and told them.'

'In this area, there is one 'client of choice' who are brought in to deal with issues of violence. It is sanctioned by the powers that be. But they are part of the organisation – the boundary is entirely fluid. You get the money because of the trouble. But if you stop the money, then they go back to the trouble.'

'And then there is people in the statutes who appear to be supporting them.'

'The X Peace Impact programme is geared to the difficult organisations, not to the middle of the road. We were taken out of the programme.'

- Without exception, group domination of these areas is strongly associated with multiple deprivation and strict housing segregation by class, politics and religion. We found a consensus that ‘tackling paramilitarism’ is inextricably linked to wider efforts to end poverty and underlying political/ethnic/religious division, although there were a number of views about the relationship of cause and effect:

‘Housing areas dictate the stretch of paramilitaries – they have little sway in privately owned areas, even if they are in the same postcode.’

‘This [is] always also about social change and about the reduction in alienation and violence in social relationships. Business and people need to be part of the pathways. Currently, this is a niche issue – for people already in multiple deprivation.’

The practical political consequence of specific geographical concentration, however, is that tackling paramilitarism is treated across Northern Ireland as a specific issue of criminality for those in the poorest districts and not in the context of the politics of the wider society, played out where law and order struggles to protect, and the advantages of gang behaviour increased.

- The areas identified as core to the Tackling Paramilitarism Programme are all marked by multiple issues of deprivation. Many statutory agencies are therefore inevitably and properly engaged in direct collaboration with local partners as a critical element to provide public services. In the absence of any way to guarantee the boundary with paramilitary presence, however, this creates significant dilemmas for all public services in practice - including the youth service. Formally, all agencies maintain that they have no direct connections with any paramilitary group. In practice, it has proved very difficult, if not impossible, to ensure that there is no statutory engagement with

paramilitarism when it is impossible to mark the boundary, leading to allegations of statutory hypocrisy and double-standards. Despite the fact that armed groups re-emerged in communities in Northern Ireland fifty years ago, few statutory agencies, with the exception of policing, have formally identified ‘tackling’ paramilitarism as a named priority in strategic or operational planning, (ie intentional and accountable programmes whose success is measured on the *elimination* of paramilitary organisations and activity). As a consequence, the Tackling Paramilitarism programme is not drawing on 50 years of established practice, but on 50 years of ‘creative adaptation’ to circumstances combined with reliance on individual initiatives and relationships. For many respondents, formal ‘condemnation’ of paramilitaries was persistently undermined by the continued interaction of public agencies with those being condemned:

‘Youth clubs condemn republican violence against young people. None of those youth workers are listened to. They cannot give support. We are asking communities to turn their backs on paramilitaries and yet the same people are invited to the meetings. It is hypocrisy.’

- During research for this project, many interviewees commented that the political environment had become more polarised, and communities were less willing to criticise paramilitaries than previously, attributing this to the collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2017, tensions over cultural displays and conflict legacy issues and the increasingly febrile debates over the implications of UK withdrawal from the EU for Northern Ireland:

‘Six months ago, people were supportive. But people say, “Every time I look, people are sticking up two fingers to us”.’

‘Attitudes to behaviour depend. Many of those active in politics and supportive of the peace process find their viewpoint and tolerance is being tested. It is also a culture. A lot of things that people experienced in the past is coming up again. Maybe you are right – things haven’t changed.’

'What has changed? I would say look at the city, the infrastructure, the investment. People see certain bits of that. But what they see that is blatant and in-your-face is people are saying, "No". Young people are in an arena where they can feel the tension, they can pick it up. All of sudden they are asking, "Are these organisations going to make me safe, stand up for us?"'

'They are criminals in search of meaning. They cling to the meaning for as long as they can. Brexit has recreated the notion that paramilitaries are for something.'

Progress in this uncertain environment is clearly at risk unless both the 'ecological' nature of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland (this is not only a law and order issue) and the local variations are taken into account. Only flexible engagement and active learning by workers, funders, communities, political leaders and agency partners can negotiate these complex dilemmas

3.3 Attitudes to violence and armed groups in communities in Northern Ireland

Underlying the inconsistent terminology and experience, however, respondents in this research were unanimous in confirming the continuing, pervasive nature and relative tolerance of 'paramilitary (armed group) activity' in the 'Fresh Start' areas. Consistently and importantly, armed group activity beyond legal limitation was so common as to be treated as part of the fabric of 'normal' community life rather than an 'abnormal' short term exception, integrated into the community's daily experience:

'The abnormal is normal – people become conditioned to the place and stop questioning what is abnormal behaviour.'

'Maybe people don't see it as a special and specific issue because paramilitarism is ingrained within these communities; it is entwined in all aspects of life.'

'The reach is huge. We see it in all places.'

'In Northern Ireland, we take it for granted – the violence and the existence of armed groups – because our benchmark is the past, even if it's nothing like the past.'

'The vacuum in law and order creates a platform which they fill – that's the problem.'

In those areas where armed group violence has been a long term reality, relationships between members of the community and those directly involved in paramilitary organisations and activities are therefore shaped within a pattern of complexity, continuity and ambivalence:

'The villages are all family connections. They will support their own. There are relations between the groups and the police at personal level. They are released right and quickly. If they are arrested and released, that is another stripe on their arm.'

Perhaps unsurprisingly, community attitudes appear at times to be complex, contradictory and unstable. This reflects a variety of different, and sometimes competing, experiences, including:

- Personal relationships with individuals who are also known for their contribution to family and community outside paramilitarism, including leadership and organisational skills;
- Disdain and disapproval of illegal paramilitary/armed group activity related to drugs and other criminal activity;
- Admiration for an identification with the political causes for which paramilitary/armed organisations stood in the past;
- Fear of paramilitary/armed group attention or reprisal, which acts to suppress open debate or criticism;
- Latent tolerance for paramilitary/armed activity acting against anti-social behaviour;
- Resentment at alleged control of community development and community resources, and the perception that state agencies collude with this development;
- Tolerance of public displays of paramilitary-related or erected emblems, history, symbols and flags.

This pattern of ambivalence and ambiguity was reflected throughout our interviews. On the one hand, interviewees emphasised that community support for illegality was strictly limited, and silence largely a matter of fear. Paramilitaries in this view were a sinister and coercive force in the community:

'Why is it that paramilitarism is thought of as authentic working class and anyone who objects is called middle class? Middle class means [a] do-gooder who doesn't understand. But it is not true. I grew up in a council estate. Addressing paramilitarism is seen as anti-working class. But it isn't. There are people trying to keep their children out of it, but they can't speak.'

'Has it changed? I don't think the reality has changed. There are some changes – more integrated relationships, and that comes from the cross-community clubs. But the people in the relationships still can't live where they want. It always was brutalising,

controlling and coercive influence on what you can and can't do. There is a code of conduct out there and if you step out of line you will have heat coming to your door. It is there. You don't need to write it down.'

'If we were to condemn them, they would stop talking to us. When I worked on the X interface, we couldn't say anything against loyalist paramilitaries. They ensured their members were always in attendance. When young people live in these communities, they are forced to join.'

'Election posters had to be 'approved' to hang in certain villages. And I had to have connections to find that out.'

Yet, on the other hand, the tradition of heroic local armed resistance is still celebrated and nurtured in the cultural messages transmitted to young people. The names of organisations and local heroes of war are widely displayed in murals, symbols and street marking in all of the areas of the Tackling Paramilitarism programme:

'If you can brand your activity as paramilitary, the state can't touch you because you have legitimacy.'

'The legacy of conflict in communities is deep – you saw it in the local bonfires. You saw the establishment – you get all the grants, you get the rules and then you get the constraints on the police. That is the legacy of conflict. It is socially acceptable. They are poisoning the well.'

'There is no doubt that paramilitaries put pressure on people not to engage with the police.'

'This community is like a living museum – in essence, you are not allowed to forget.'

'As youth workers, we were out trying to sort out the bonfire [in our area]. And when I was there, Saoradh came out and said, "If the police come in here, we will defend this community". And they had a traction.'

'Communities are still defined by crime. Community identity is tied up with heroic resistance, and the paramilitaries are associated with this. Alternative identity formation. Paramilitaries stand up for me as a lost person.'

Even apparently straightforward descriptions of paramilitaries as criminals and drug dealers were qualified by some interviewees. In some areas, paramilitaries seem to see their role as protecting the community from drugs and maintaining order against the potential for criminal organised crime. However, it was acknowledged that this type of action also inevitably sustained the brand of paramilitarism within the community, which could later be abused:

'Drugs is a big problem... We have lost the drugs war. You always hear about the paramilitaries involved in drugs. And there is some – and I would acknowledge that. But not ALL of them are drug dealers. But there are others dealing drugs too. Drug deals and paramilitaries are not one thing. But Chinese and Eastern Europeans are supplying drugs too. There is a lot of laziness in saying paramilitaries are involved in racketeering and gangsterism. There are some, but it is much bigger than that.'

'In this area, if drugs are picked up, the paramilitaries and loyalist groups are out supporting the police. The difficulty is that the paramilitaries are still perpetuating the messenger. We needed a suitability panel [that existed in restorative justice] or something like it. The thing about ex-prisoners is that you can't get taxi licences but you can run the country.'

The 'legitimacy' or paramilitarism is thus a highly volatile social variable and may change quickly depending on the specific issue in dispute, the immediate political environment and local perceptions of the alternatives. This volatility makes it hard for youth workers to develop a consistent approach to intervention. For example, some youth workers reported that community support for violent attacks on local 'hoodlums' involved in chronic anti-social behaviour was high and embedded:

- *'We ran five seminars over the last two years trying to get the community to get people to understand. That hasn't worked in this area yet. We will have to continue.'*
- *'We get accusations of rewarding bad behaviour – goodies for baddies.'*

Overall, the research confirmed that paramilitarism is not a phenomenon with clear and unambiguous boundaries in communities, but is an aspect of community life that has become organically embedded through its complex, locally specific and imprecise boundaries with families, political ideology and identity, community organisation, informal community power structures including the local formal and informal economy, criminal justice and welfare issues. At this stage of development, external partners relate on a daily basis to 'paramilitaries' or members of armed groups in a variety of contexts that, superficially at least, are only tangentially linked to paramilitarism, or engage with paramilitaries as community spokespeople on issues as different as educational needs, housing and children's services.

This may not always be apparent to observers outside communities, who see only the illegal and political consequences of armed groups. But it does suggest that change in this will require both a sensitivity to local difference, and therefore reliance on local knowledge AND the ability to

confront power structures that rely on coercion and repression for their local power, which can only come from outside. It also suggests that public discourse will have to become more honest about the dilemmas and ambiguities facing local, political and statutory actors (including councils, the police, youth services and housing authorities), which ‘tackling paramilitarism’ means in practice at community level.

‘We need a new confident social narrative about communities.’

3.4 The pressures on young people in communities in Northern Ireland with a paramilitary presence

There was consensus among all interviewees that young people were at the front line of the experience of paramilitarism in communities as both participants in and victims of activity, ideology and culture.

‘Young people in this area usually have three options: one, they go to school, get a job and have no association with these groups or criminal activity; two, those that are manipulated into joining because of a debt or risk of beating; three, those that choose this lifestyle. That third group requires a specific skill set to work with – [a] special language and relationship style – to confront their choices.’

‘The people that are being arrested are young. And that is why it important to get them early. The psychology of this is get them early, when their life journey is shaped. So, a lot of our work now is [in] primary school. Our challenge is not the young people; it is building resilience in young people.’

The interviewees identified both ‘push’ factors, which encouraged or drove young people to either become or remain involved in paramilitarism, and ‘pull’ factors, which attracted young people. These factors included:

- family ties, which encouraged a sense of identity and belonging in extended networks;

- personal security in a hostile environment through membership of a group;
- pathways to identity and power at local level;
- excitement and perceived glamour;
- opportunities for financial gain;
- debt and dependency issues, including drugs;
- bad experiences of policing or wider authority.

Interviewees acknowledged that paramilitarism was not a new phenomenon but was established as an element of community and sometimes family identity:

'For some of them, it is what they are used to.'

This was combined with the attraction of belonging to a 'gang' identified in the previous section on models of practice outside Northern Ireland:

'The group in this area are young people searching for a sense of identity/security/belonging to feel safe. They identify with a group to have protection. The other element is the rush, the adrenaline. The young men don't understand the fear and the consequences. For a lot of them, it is a bit of craic, a bit of banter, and they don't see the short-term or long-term consequences.'

Association with a paramilitary group or activity can therefore be the result of a variety of push and pull factors, some of which are voluntary, some coercive, and it may or may not be consciously to do with ideology or criminality. Critically, the intergration of paramilitarism is pervasive,

such that even where young people consciously separate from paramilitaries, they end up participating within the sphere of action of paramilitary groups:

'Young people initiate their own gangs distinct from the paramilitaries but are involved in drugs and crime so really they are being controlled but don't often recognise it. They don't necessarily hold allegiances to paramilitaries they don't recognise their cause/ideology or why they exist beyond a control function. The irony is they want to engage in the behaviours associated with paramilitaries – drugs and crime.'

At the same time, many young people see armed groups as another form of social control. According to youth workers, some act this out by escalating violence and anti-social behaviour in the community as a reactive and distorted means of resistance and identity expression:

'There are also young people that rebel against all forms of authority – illegal and legal.'

'Some have what we call "Fuck 'em syndrome" and they say, "If I am going to jail, I may as well go for something big".'

Many interviewees identified the absence of meaningful relationships between young people and policing as a common theme in both loyalist and republican areas and were critical of the approach of policing at-risk young people, which they felt was often counterproductive, and created impediments to their own ability to work with police:

'Currently, the practice is personality-based and there is no real institutional contract. Also, the relationship is with constables and once you go up the pipe the police lose knowledge and become unclear about what is happening. Basically, I don't think they internally share information.'

Many young people still share the basic assumption that the primary aim of police officers is to gather wider intelligence, potentially turning the young people into 'touts' and social pariahs among their peers:

'There is a fear factor there still when you explain to the young people the nature of your role with the police. From the police perspective, they need to get better at sharing information and not see it all as intelligence.'

In some places, this has created a vacuum in social control that the paramilitaries first filled and now protect against the encroachment of the police, using an ideological justification:

'The vacuum in law and order creates a platform which they [the paramilitary/armed groups] fill – that's the problem.'

In this context, young people are largely the targets of brutal paramilitary action, where members of armed groups are able to portray themselves as acting on behalf of the community in the absence of policing.

3.5 Is tackling paramilitarism a role for youth work?

Armed activity including recruitment by armed organisations engaging local young people has been a continuous reality in some communities in Northern Ireland since 1969. However, this research did not identify any current project or community-based youth work programme with the explicit or primary aim of preventing young people from joining local armed groups or paramilitary organisations, or with an explicit mission to support young people if they seek to leave. There is no developed or formal body of practice with this aim and only occasional community-led comment on its absence, and usually from external commentators. This contrasts sharply with PREVENT and CHANNEL in Great Britain, and with international projects that explicitly seek to tackle radicalisation, whether among young Muslims or in the context of extreme right-wing organisations or to support exit. Moreover, we did not find youth work projects that equate membership of a paramilitary or armed

group with the international concept of 'gangs' and there has not yet been any direct effort to end paramilitary membership along the lines attempted in Glasgow in the CIRV project in relation to knife crime.

In a sense, it appears that 'paramilitaries' and organisations which promote armed action within a political ideology have been untouchable within certain communities, anchored in a taken-for-granted understanding that any effort to address this would put both lives and services at risk. Implicitly, therefore, armed groups continue to determine what can and cannot happen in the lives of communities and young people in all of the Fresh Start communities in transition.

In general, therefore, the phenomenon of 'paramilitarism' has been seen as a political phenomenon or series of connected political phenomena in Northern Ireland requiring a political solution, rather than a problem of violence, safeguarding or criminality. Strikingly, despite the Good Friday Agreement, new elected frameworks and formal social consensus that change should only be achieved by 'exclusively peaceful and democratic means', armed group activity drawing on historical causes and symbolism has not yet been brought to a halt. For some people, this is a glaring gap for society as a whole:

'You can't tackle this issue head on. We are told there is no such thing as paramilitaries in this area because it doesn't exist. This dog is so vicious you can't kick it.'

'For me, this is a crisis of vision, understanding [analysis], trust, authority, concept, leadership, management. And all will need to change.'

'No organisation has tackling paramilitarism as a remit. But we see ourselves as providing an alternative.'

'On the issue of direct naming, there is a general feeling we should be taking people out of paramilitarism, but we are still clinging on to it. [T]he only tactic that we have is not naming directly. The other direct approach would get its head blown off. So you have to work out what you are up against. There are still those there who see these initiatives as threat.'

This clearly has implications for the safety of both young people and people working with them. Through the research, we explored whether preventing young people from becoming members of armed groups or supporting them to leave was a youth work responsibility within the terms of the concept of safeguarding. Respondents had a variety of views. Overwhelmingly, respondents believed that the commitment of youth workers to young people implied a relentless engagement on their behalf against all threats, including paramilitarism, rather than either focusing on or ignoring paramilitarism as a topic:

'We probably operate from a youth engagement [and] personal development angle. But the issue of paramilitarism is there. You are not doing it specifically, working with young people attached to a youth club, but they are susceptible to all influences. We provide diversionary activities and that is what it is.'

'What we were trying to stop [was] people being brutalised... Our primary purpose then was de-escalating situational crisis, supporting young people in opportunities to engage in something while they weren't working. It was also workforce development for ourselves.'

'But the other side is that personal journey. When you go with them through the court, they realise you are interested in them:

"I used to think you were a wanker, but you are alright".'

'There are those that stay away from that stuff, and others who go at it straight on. We are trying our best to engage on risks. We are providing a different opportunity for young people. We would meet on a Friday evening when they would be out running the streets. It is almost a 'midnight club'. But it gives them somewhere on a Friday night. They may not stay.'

The majority of rinterviewees in this research acknowledged that paramilitarism and its implications for young people in some communities could not be ignored by either workers or young people. At the same, time, most felt that the only way to address the issue of armed groups and young people was oblique and opportunistic rather than direct and confrontational:

'In this area, you have to be constantly mindful of the issue and the impact it has on the community and relationships, but we try not to let it dominate our work. Possibly the main area where it could impact is in relation to detached youth work, because of the issue of territory.'

'Yes it is an issue... but it is not something that I consciously think about.'

'There used to be an issue that paramilitaries didn't go for youth workers. But when they went for one of ours ... I had to tell people, "Tell me what you can't or don't want to do". When we said, "We are going to meet Saoradh", we did it to protect the young people. If we see they are in danger, we will challenge.'

'How do you build resilience in which the trenches are part of the architecture? We give people different, emotionally powerful experiences of each other.'

'What does it take to run a community? Law and accountability for actions are part of it. Because of their lack of political leadership, we are starting to create a society of lawlessness. And some of the young people's attitudes are "So what?" How do we get back to "No, you can't do what you want"?''

'We now have a girl who was trailed through [a major community confrontation] in 2001. She was a prime target for getting involved. We went in and she met the people in [the primary schools in the same area] and decided not to go there. Now, she is running a game of three halves in [front-line districts]. She consciously says, "I could have been part of that". That journey up there is a pretty significant one.'

'You don't know how many people would be involved if we hadn't been there. Would they not be the boys or the people if there had not been an alternative? We don't name it up front, but we do try to build a resilience. We do talk about it. They know somebody from the other side. Contact is not enough. Conversation has to be part of it. A relationship facilitates a conversation and a conversation creates a rethink possibility.'

For others, however, work to end paramilitarism was an automatic extension of youth work values in a Northern Ireland context:

'In a community where young people can be recruited now, one of our jobs is to keep them out of the hands of paramilitaries. Our job is to reduce their hatred of others. This is our task. The problem is, we are far too focused on generalism. The problem is, it is seen as something only for specialists in eight areas. It is a key part of our job.'

'It is just part of the job, an accepted responsibility. At the end of the day, you are there for the young person regardless of the issues – that's why we got into this profession – and if they do end up within a paramilitary group it is not the failure of the youth worker. There are so many variables that lead to that scenario. You can never write someone off but, instead, always leave the door open.'

These workers were largely of the view that a values-led approach had always been central to the task of youth work in communities:

'We were always dealing with these issues then Fresh Start came along and everyone thought it was something new and unique. Youth workers don't necessarily see this as different work, especially if this is all they have done and confronted – this has been their environment.'

This included direct negotiation on behalf of young people with organisations in the community:

'I see it as an 'of course' issue. All of my friends were prominent paramilitaries. Some of my kids in this area are the dissidents. So, I have to negotiate.'

In general, they were critical of the absence of formal training, organisational guidance or official support for workers or young people. As one worker commented:

'They are not training it in here [Ulster University]. I am fighting to have 'circle of courage' and 'good relations' back on the degree. There is no trauma-informed practice on the course.'

This view cannot, however, be regarded as an established consensus within youth work. For some, the political nature of armed struggle remains an 'option' that a young person can legitimately explore, even if youth work is obliged to offer and suggest alternatives. Tackling paramilitarism was the responsibility of the political class and the police, who could also not be fully endorsed by youth work. Youth work's task is to offer a free space for open exploration within that political frame:

'It is not a youth worker's job to tackle paramilitarism. It is the job of the youth sector to engage with paramilitarism as it affects younger people. It is our responsibility to mitigate the effects on young people. It is up to governments to tackle paramilitarism – it is way beyond our brief.'

'People claiming that they are doing this work and are clearly not. Forty-odd years ago, in working class areas, workers were not about getting people to stop supporting the UDA or the IRA. Many youth workers would have supported the existence of these organisations. Many people would not have seen their job as getting young people to stop people joining. But when the young people we engage with say "We recognise the right of republicans to engage in armed struggle", we need to see if it is effective and we say why not.'

'Our passion is to create options – to help people push back against the system in a different way. We identified an issue with a real deficit in young people with leadership capacity from loyalist communities – to empower young people to push back. Our

role is to establish a relationship with young people to give them voice. [And on a] policy level, to speak to politicians – to create an influencing role.'

In this view, an obligation on youth workers to tackle paramilitarism would also put both workers and young people at unacceptable risk:

'Cops negotiated the deals directly [around the bonfires] – so they see where power lies. It is not my role. It puts my staff and young people I work with at risk. The community knows that the state cannot get rid of the groups. So why should we? Despite recent deaths, there is still continuing recruitment.'

'The reality of the situation is that members of our staff have their cars attacked. I have woken up with a car outside the doors. We work with anyone. It is very risky. We have staff working in communities where people are active. People are asking, "Where does the money come from?"'

While larger cohort of youth workers in this research took the view that tackling paramilitarism was a responsibility of youth work, the majority also felt that it could only be undertaken on the basis of strict adherence to the goals, values and purposes of youth work, and largely without direct reference to the issue of 'tackling paramilitarism'. In practice, youth workers often provide the last available responsible adult for many young people:

'Also, if it is out of sight then it is out of mind – so, statutory bodies drop in and out and they don't have to confront the reality every day, so it's easier to ignore it. However, a youth worker in the area can't ignore it as it transcends all aspects of their work.'

In this view, the over-riding duty of a youth worker is to focus on the future of each young person, placing the emphasis of youth work on young people and their needs, including but not defined by armed violence.:

'We will always challenge, because the ultimate thing is protecting young people.'

'The role of youth work is in the transition from childhood to adulthood. Relationships are key to successful work, not programme per se. Invest in local adults with mentoring – not parent-child, but parent-young adult. A special adult is critical to young adults as both a witness and a measure.'

'Our role is to build the capacity of young people to use other mechanisms to achieve their ends. To think about different ways of affecting social change. More important is: are we encouraging them to be critical thinkers and push back? Themes like social justice and social change, and what does youth-led justice mean?'

'We are trying to empower young people to support the view that violence is not the only possibility. We focus on the individual.'

In all cases, however, respondents agreed that youth work could only make a useful contribution within a collaborative environment and were keen that this point that should be emphasised by the Educational Authority:

'EA cannot create a strategic engagement. Collaboration is critical.'

'Collaborative partnership and learning is crucial.'

'Investing in communities is important. Youth work has a role but it is not all youth work.'

3.6 Youth work where paramilitarism is a continuing reality in communities

Aside from the central tasks of providing protected space away from traumatic social influences, direct personal development intervention and personal emotional support, youth work activity to prevent damage to young people in relation to paramilitarism often fell into three broad categories: mediation, diversion and advocacy.

As mediators, youth workers described finding themselves at the centre of negotiations with young people (both individually and in groups), armed organisations, political parties, local residents, statutory agencies (including the police and local councils) and the media as one of the few people of trust capable of finding solutions. For example:

'We had conversations with local community, independent councillors and Sinn Féin about the bonfire. Once we got them to agree that tyres are not good for our community, the young boys took them out. We have been building relationships with these young people for months. They have no aspirations, no hope or nothing.'

'The reality is that paramilitary growth requires community support, so they have to be careful not to alienate the community. So, the relationships between youth workers and young people is important, because we are engaging and managing issues associated with often very marginalised young people.'

For some critics, this may fall short of tackling paramilitarism, but it was also acknowledged that diversion often creates opportunities for change or prevents escalation allowing youth workers to protect young people from harm and further involvement by taking young people into unknown yet trusted circumstances. This was consciously part of the strategy of projects that used sport or excursions as a vehicle to engage or protect alienated young people.

'Sport does not have to be about friendships but it has to be about the possibility of a friendship. The relationship which a team creates allows people to talk differently. You have to take the opportunity of that new relationship. You have to sustain it – a team sport creates this. It also creates a shared mission and vision. And it creates a shared dependency.'

'Where something happens in the city, there is now a system. Twelfth July, police rang me – I rang [another youth club], "Can you put [on] some activities?" They said yes, we put street workers on, and [the other club] took 60 kids to the bowling alley.'

'Interventions should not always mean people have to leave their community. At the time of Lyra McKee, we were going to take people out of our community. It changed our mindset. We put money from the Agile Fund. We dropped the 'taking people out' process. Instead, we organised a family-orientated day [here] to show the true spirit – music, water sports, staff mingling with community: 1,542 people participated – but the media refused to report it.'

Beyond short-term diversion, a number of youth workers pointed to persistent presentation of alternatives such as employment, as a vital element in any process of change:

'This year, there was no political involvement in the bonfire. That was a big help. The youth employment scheme under the Education Authority was also a great help. We have a group of 12 young people all previously involved at different levels in riots

and bonfires and so on. I asked the young people why they wanted the job and they said, "I don't want to be part of what I was part of last year". Not one of them has been arrested this year. We got the right people in – they had to go through an application process to reinforce achievement. They had an induction and training – induction, child protection, CRED. This year, nobody will be out on bonfire night.'

Youth workers often also find themselves as the advocates for young people at risk from paramilitaries, exploitation by other elements or caught up in anti-social behaviour:

'You have to prove you have the kid's back. You have to visit them in jail. You have to help them when they are off their faces.'

'You need to talk to the paramilitaries? We will do that for you. Do you need counselling? We will get that. How do we keep you safe? Do you need time out? The question is, "How do we fix it?"'

The research confirmed that there is currently no fixed view among practitioners about the appropriate approach to be taken by youth workers towards addressing paramilitarism. However, it is possible to identify a number of issues that may be important to debate at professional level:

- Youth workers in local communities rely on community confidence and consent to do their work. The key to effective work is an effective trust between the community and the programme, the community and the worker(s), the worker(s) and the young person. In the absence of a consistent position on tackling paramilitarism among political and community leaders, especially at local level, youth workers cannot act without caution.
- Tackling paramilitarism directly in communities in Northern Ireland could put young people and youth workers at personal risk or prevent them from doing their job. All the evidence is that the more successful it is in addressing interests in community, the more work needs to be supported. However, it is not always clear who workers and young people can rely on for protection.

- Youth workers share the ambivalence in Northern Ireland as a whole about policing and the history of armed struggle.
- There are tensions within value-based approaches to youth work between an emphasis on non-violence and an emphasis on participation and freedom of expression.
- The focus of youth work is the development and quality of life of young people. Tackling paramilitarism is a secondary aim within this primary priority.

3.7 Evolving youth work practice to address paramilitarism in communities

The research identified a number of common themes in relation to good practice for youth work with young people ‘at risk’ of engagement in criminal behaviour through ‘gangs’ or armed groups.

Every youth worker in this research project agreed that change in behaviour only happened in and through relationships. As several people said independently, ‘Relationships are the heart of the work’. This is entirely consistent with all of the most successful international models of violence reduction surveyed in the first part of our research. For many workers, it was also part of their own experience as young people in relation to other issues:

‘Church and youth work saved me. If you get people who are prepared to give people time. People think it is money but it is not – it is time. Persistent, professional, well-boundaried. Accountability comes from that. Kids will roll with the flow.’

It therefore seems likely that the specific contribution of youth work to any programme related to armed groups may lie in its capacity to engage in face-to-face relationships with young people at risk, rather than simply ‘tackle paramilitarism’ as a specific political or social phenomenon. At the same time, as described by a number of respondents, this work requires professional and boundaried work entailing a

degree of honesty and directness that has sometimes been characterised as 'tough love', combining focused attention with an insistence on responsibility-taking:

'These kids get all their love, care and attention from negative behaviour. They get negative skills; they get attention from deviancy. So, we sit them down and we talk to them. We have a poster in every room. And we say "What did you do? What are you responsible for? What are the consequences, and how would you resolve the issue?"'

'We keep telling them, "Stop telling me about what he done. What did you do?" We have to get them back to "What did you do?"'

The qualities of a good worker were, perhaps unsurprisingly, consistent with core qualities of good youth work in the work identified at international level and included:

- Persistence
- Consistency
- 'On the street'
- Value-driven
- Prioritising pastoral care
- Clear about boundaries
- Pro-social modelling
- A degree of street cred.

It was acknowledged that many workers already had these qualities, but that there had been little strategic support, either in relation to focus on the question of tackling paramilitarism and its consequences for young people in communities or for workers working in the field where paramilitarism was a reality:

'There is a gap in terms of our practice around engaging with gangs and theory of gang culture – that is a big and growing issue in these communities, and it doesn't necessarily start out as paramilitary-controlled.'

'We do have defined practice. But it is still not strategic.'

'This is a process of changing what youth workers do and how youth workers understand what youth work is to do. For far too long we have been too airy-fairy.'

The themes of persistence and consistency were also common among all the professionals interviewed. In relation to young people at risk, workers accepted that inconsistency and unreliability were expected behaviours and that the job of youth workers was to offer a pro-social model that could challenge this for young people. It also echoed the themes of 'relentless follow-up' evident in some of the 'gang'-based projects in the US, surveyed earlier:

'The Education Authority were sending different people and opening on different days. What we did was keep turning up. That consistency was really important.'

'It is a question of not succeeding for a while – and yet sticking with it.'

'You need to commit and follow through. Consistent and persistent. The landscape is better. Before, you had to rap people's doors and you built relations with their das and mas and cousins.'

'My role is not four nights in a youth club. I go out to the family. We have this circle of courage, which we do as one-to-one, and we can know the young person. Through our life map system we know the person. We can identify what the issue is. We can't be all things to all people – and we can transfer between people.'

Building on these themes, there was a degree of consensus about the priorities of any youth-based programme to reduce engagement with armed or group violence:

- De-glamorisation – de-glamorise violence with restorative principles
- Street by street
- Keep going – persistence
- Local people are critical (both in support and in change)
- Down and dirty – real issues (no cheap answers)
- Peer approach to change (learning is from a model, not from an instructor)
- Reformulating the issue (not against paramilitarism – FOR a meaningful identity)
- Hot spot where it matters – but be flexible with boundaries (respond with intelligence)
- Agile and flexible funding (think, act, account)
- Give credit for good work – do not keep people in the box (allow people to change)

According to one interviewee, the outstanding challenge in Northern Ireland remains the continuing lack of urgency in relation to the development of good practice and of testing and applying it appropriately:

'I developed the gear-stick model of youth work – fifth gear is all about the gang culture.'

Nonetheless, in interviews, a number of issues emerged as consistent priorities, in any changed approach, to improve youth work practice in this area:

1. A revision of the understanding of 'risk' in youth work to ensure that the concept of 'at risk' is focused away from generic socio-economic indicators, to enable youth workers to identify and focus effort on those young people identified as at risk from serious involvement with criminality and violence:

'We have taken a service and pushed them and trained them in understanding what 'young people at risk' (YPAR) is and how we transition people back from the dark side of social capital to the light side. The language doesn't help. Because risk is a term which can mean anything. We deal with it in terms of normal risks – drugs and the like. But we want to work at the really hard end – those at risk of getting involved in physical attacks and violence, of harming themselves and harming others.'

'These kids hate everybody and everybody hates them. This is a two-way system. The community hates them, persecutes them. We are only talking seven to ten kids [in my area]. But they are the most fragile, broken kids you have ever met in your life. Nobody wants to help them, but nobody wants to walk with them.'

2. A formal professional recognition of the damage that violence does to young people, both through trauma as victims and in traumatising others. This would, in turn, enable significant commitment to difficult young people who have suffered in and through

violence, requiring a willingness by professionals to be honest about unacceptable behaviours with young people, while working more closely with them. For one worker in this research, this entailed a formal shift in the emphasis of youth work towards trauma-informed practice and supporting youth workers in learning how to respond appropriately:

'We are now out in the field, training youth workers and teachers in what the meaning of AT RISK is and knowing how to tackle it, all in a strength-based perspective – you don't judge the person, but you judge the behaviour and get them to take responsibility. You get them to progress the behaviour while understanding them as a valuable human being.'

3. Focused work that may reduce the total number of young people being worked with at any one time but that also involves a commitment to end exclusions for difficult young people, a culture of reflective practice for workers and increased attention to action research. This aligned closely with the concept of 'relentless outreach' adopted in ROCA.

'It used to be about numbers – 45 a night, at least. I once did 90. It was mental. I went to them and said, "Forty is our maximum, with the behaviours we are dealing with". Now, I take four staff with 12 people.'

'We need one-on-one work, bespoke programmes, sufficient time resources – which means enough people and the capacity to adapt spending to needs and changing events.'

'Time is a massive issue – you just don't have the time or space. We value it, but time is the barrier. There is such a high burnout in this work – people can get very negative too.'

'We need reflective practice which encourages reflection in young people.'

'We are not doing enough research. We need more.'

'We need new techniques, new knowledge, new research. More expert advice. More accountability. I have external evaluators and they advise. They give me resources. We have never had that in the past.'

The contribution of this kind of focused commitment to youth at risk as a way to limit the impact of violence is clearly distinctive from other approaches to tackling paramilitarism, including law and order. At the same time, it may go some way to squaring the circle of a role for youth work in preventing violence and the impact of violence, and the directly political task of tackling paramilitarism by ensuring that youth work retains its focus on the young person while addressing paramilitarism as a traumatic experience of violence.

In the most extreme cases of damage, however, youth workers in this research also acknowledged that youth work intervention alone will not resolve issues of gang violence and requires interagency cooperation:

'We graded our young people as greens, ambers and reds – greens and ambers we have been successful with, reds not so much. Our new method is 'anti-group' work. Our job was to build down their group identity and rebuild it. We wanted them back from the dark side of social capital. The ambers take more work than the greens. For the reds, we can't do that with youth work alone. We need a multi-disciplinary approach. The youth worker is their person of trust. We take them to appointments; we meet them in prison. But they need more than that.'

The notion of 'anti-group' work has echoes of the work of EXIT Sweden, which sees its task as creating positive peer group association as a critical supportive factor for people leaving violent group ideology.

3.8 Collaborative community youth work for tackling paramilitarism

One of the most striking themes to emerge from the research was the initially paradoxical suggestion that any success would depend on BOTH local credibility AND the engagement of trusted outsiders.

In the first instance, local credibility was a constant theme of interviewees in relation to the ability of any professional, including youth workers, to engage with paramilitarism and armed group violence in Northern Ireland. Indeed, all respondents were of the view that unless there was sufficient trust with the local community, no work could be successful:

'You have to also remember that the overwhelming majority of youth workers in these locations are all from the area. They have always lived here or have family. That means they know the history and identity of the place, they know who are the partnerships that you need to make, what the politics of the local community are like, what constitutes good and bad behaviour – and they also have credibility. This is crucial for this type of work, and a lot of it cannot be trained or read in a book.'

'If you want somebody to do it, you need to think about that. It's like all things – an idea you prove. It is simple: you know your area and you know where you can go. When you get local people committed to trying to do things right in their communities you can change it. Outsiders going in will never change it.'

'You have to get the support in the community. But if they see local people doing it, they have a vested interest. And even in the East, there is people to talk to. Even then, we did street by street. Mothers and grannies out on the streets telling their kids what to do.'

'Working class communities who are trying to do things need supported... Those who were doing it put the boots on the ground. We were doing it for 'us'. It was our children, it was our communities getting caught up in it.'

'Young adult stuff. I think this issue is totally different in different places. If you look at young people alone, on their own, it does not work. You have to look at the whole community to understand where their young people fit.'

'You have to get out and about on the streets. EA need to do that. You have to know the kids. You have to get down and dirty.'

To some extent, this is a logical conclusion from the demonstrable reality that each context is subtly different, made worse in Northern Ireland by the insularity and inward focus of many of the separated areas in this programme.

'In each community, the Fresh Start worker is different. Even here, it is different.'

Yet, some respondents were also aware that the need for local credibility sometimes came at the cost of independence of action, creativity and innovation, especially in a challenging area of work where there are powerful, local vested interests willing to use intimidation to achieve their ends, or where the community sides decisively against the interests of a young person (for example, in cases of anti-social behaviour):

'Local knowledge and reputation is key in this field of work – it gives credibility. But the risk then is that it does not create an environment where new thinking can be introduced.'

'We are often slow to recognise what is normal and what is abnormal behaviour. We become conditioned to the local issues and think that is simply the way things are – you see everything as normative – so reflective practice is crucial. But... you also need a good challenge when doing reflective work – need to be questioned about why we do the things we do.'

There was, therefore, a broad agreement that the generation of trust towards the goal of tackling paramilitarism in youth work required attention to active relationship-building between a number of key stakeholders and partners. In every case, these included maintaining the confidence of young people, local workers and their managers, the local community, external mentors, and partner agencies (sometimes including the police). The interviewees most common terms used to describe this were 'mentoring', 'active learning' and 'co-delivery', including co-design:

'Mentoring is critical.'

'The Education Authority work doesn't work directly here. Co-delivery is very important – vital.'

'Having transitional figures of authority and identity is very important to a young person. The four Ps: [a] parental, persistent, protective personality. A mentor is sometimes one good adult.'

'We must co-design and create interventions together. It is getting much better. But it never happened before.'

'Partnership allows us to share risks... Risk-sharing is critical, because we share the same values.'

'The key to effective work is an effective trust between the community and the programme, the community and the worker/workers, the worker(s) and the young person.'

One interviewee suggested that this approach, together with a commitment to reflective practice and flexibility in response to learning, should be hard-wired into any programme on the theme of tackling violence in communities, establishing:

- A bespoke programme of work involving teams;
- Ensuring that people are paired – a young person just out of university with all the knowledge of best practice and a clear understanding of current approaches and theories alongside a more experienced person, say 50+ years of age;
- This would ensure that the programme of work had local credibility and that the team would have the knowledge of community politics and local history to guide the interactions – a local person can command respect; an outsider would struggle for legitimacy;
- This work is challenging and it is crucial that people have opportunities for debriefing and reflective practice.

This kind of co-delivery approach might allow for both established and new knowledge to be engaged, for learning involving a number of sources and for local capacity to be engaged fruitfully and producing new outcomes. One worker described changing understanding in their own project:

'We don't sign [young people] up to basketball any more. We are a community relations and peacebuilding organisation that uses sport. Basketball is particularly useful here because it doesn't belong to any group. But you have to lever the sport. They join an integrated team and they know that. Ideally, the kids get hooked. Maybe the basketball is the hook. If I had gone to [a state school] and said, "Let's play Gaelic [football]", it would not have worked. Basketball allowed some of the parents to step up... I am interested in the tool. The original motivation was we want to do something with the sport. In desperation, they used money as a hook. The schools saw the dollars. But now they see it as a way to do their PDMU. Now, we say the teachers need to

change, and the teachers need to change. There is a transfer from our work to “Today, we talked about diversity in the classroom”.’

3.9 Challenges for youth work in addressing issues arising from paramilitarism

In the course of the research, workers identified ten specific challenges to the successful delivery of a systematic programme to tackling paramilitarism that should be addressed:

- 1. Tackling paramilitary activity and the culture of paramilitarism in communities is currently not systematic but relies on individual workers and their relationships in communities and with other agencies.**

‘Detached youth work is still the best way of responding to these issues – one-to-one methodologies, with good strong links to statutory partners. However, a lot of this work is still personality-driven – so we know people in the NIHE [Northern Ireland Housing Executive] or PSNI and we can get things done. But there is no corporate knowledge of how to do joined-up, consistent work.’

‘Outside Belfast, the professional structure does not exist.’

- 2. Training in this area of youth work remains poorly developed and cannot be relied on in the field. Respondents felt that mentoring and reflective practice for workers were more appropriate for a developing field with huge risks and the potential for worker isolation.**

- 3. Dealing with difficult young people at risk from involvement as either perpetrator or victim is complex work, requiring both attention to recruitment and constant attention and reflection on the part of the worker:**

'Much of this work has to happen on the street, but it is difficult. Because you only have your own boundaries. You are in their classroom. If you have them in a room, you can reinforce a healthy learning environment. You can use peer influence to de-escalate the situation. It is a valuable tool, but you need the right people; otherwise, the risks supersede the likelihood of success. Either they take unnecessary risks or they end up avoiding the risk and walking around doing nothing.'

- 4. There are real fears about the intimidation and safety of workers in communities, especially if workers are seen to work in cooperation with the police. The expectations on workers need to be appropriately managed.**

'If we were to say that we were working on paramilitarism, how long would the project last? How long would we last?'

- 5. Work to address the consequences of paramilitarism for young people in communities needs to be imaginative and flexible, requiring active and intelligent workers, and will require that resources can be made available in a timely way. This will require new approaches to accountability that focus on outcomes as well as procedures.**

'There are certain situations where the rules don't fit. START programme works with 12 kids. You would never have got that in the past. x has taken a risk. X is seeing that the quality and the intervention is there.'

'Rules are guidelines, not laws – you need the ability to take decisions.'

'Agile funding is vital if you are to take opportunities.'

'[Here] four of us are the overseers of the money. We decide. This whole ethos came about because of the local tension about [the] outcome of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry and the decision to prosecute one person. We knew we should be flexible. We are focused on young people, where beforehand we would have focused on the club. I said [our club] would do the risk assessment for everyone [in our city], and we were able to take 310 people to activities.'

'The amount of money that is pumped into areas is not reviewed. It is money to manage.'

- 6. Re-orientating youth work provision to tackling paramilitarism means prioritising those most at risk. This is a culture change for much youth work.**

'We are seeing changes. We are not a general service; we are a focused service.'

- 7. Tackling paramilitarism successfully through youth work will require persistence and consistency from funders as well as projects.**

'If people have paved the way, don't try and invent the wheel. Novelty gets prioritised, not effectiveness.'

- 8. There is no simple cause and effect that youth work can deliver in tackling paramilitarism. Success for youth work may not look like statistical change, but rather, small changes that enable larger social changes. Government agencies need to support workers as they**

engage with this topic and change their own expectations of success. Additionally, they should be willing to adapt changes learned through the programme into their mainstream activities.

'We are punching holes in some of the walls. Creating complexity is the issue. We work with 2,500 people and 250 stick and do the school programme. Parents make that decision, not schools. And the kids make the decision. And of the 250, we have the 50 people who become coaches and facilitators – they are trained to be community relations workers through sport. And they then use the sports. You have empowered and skilled up people, but they hit every barrier. What can we do to start punching holes in the walls? The machine swallows you up.'

9. Honesty about difficulties and challenges is difficult in an environment that is driven by corporate success and a media culture that money spent on tackling difficult issues is money misdirected.

'How do people become honest about the uncertainty of the work? We need a more honest environment...X is saying, "I am okay with people messing up, as long as you learn".'

10. Accountability needs to be related to outcomes. Outcomes need to be assessed honestly, with the chance to evolve and adjust practice if things do not work on the first attempt. Reflective learning should be coordinated a central level.

'How do we build the safeguards into the system [accountability]?'

3.10 Measuring success?

In this research, many of the respondents were keen to point out that the Tackling Paramilitarism programme, more generally, should develop a meaningful understanding of change and the pace at which it can be delivered, as well as the role that youth work can play in supporting young people in change. For youth workers, paramilitarism is the context, not the problem: the professional challenge is finding effective ways to support culture change against violence for young people in communities where group-based violence and self-protective organisation have remained ingrained.

In general, youth workers in this research agreed that the only meaningful level of measurement was in changed life prospects for young people and communities. The contribution of youth work in this environment is never the single-handed eradication of paramilitarism, but seeking to end the violation of young people. Inevitably, that is a multi-agency task, with the community also at its heart:

'Outcome accountability is ultimately the only test.'

There was a sense that a meaningful programme would have to accept that change for young people is measured in changes over time, rather than in immediate responses.

'We touch lots of people, who don't deliver for ten years. It is much more organics than cause and effect. A seed produces – but only if it gets support. You have to keep sowing. Very difficult to track. There are triggers and the key is resilience when it happens.'

'We are equipping our children to do it differently to how we do it now. We are not asking the kids to do it for us. We are putting something new in, not doing the same thing – the definition of madness.'

Within this broad framework, youth workers accepted that indicative changes were also important as milestones in the shorter term. This required a degree of qualitative assessment, including stories of potential, which could act as exemplars for future work, especially in a developing new area of work. A number of examples were offered:

'Recruitment is not at the level it once was. I know that when you are looking around, say at Remembrance Day, there are very few young ones. No teenagers coming through. Do they want to be involved? Some do. There is no paramilitarism in the old sense, but those from that kind of background who want to do things in a positive way don't get a chance.'

'In 2002, we could not have gone into [some schools]. But in 2010 we could. Getting them from two buses into one bus was new as well. Then going to each other's schools. But that was a ten-year journey. The kids became the champions for the parents. But that is all about the resilience thing.'

'Success looks like the kids that are coming through and are now giving back. Of course, we do surveys and attitudinal surveys and numbers and all that. But we are trying to start something. We give them the tools and the context where that might be possible. You give them the language and the knowledge. We would test some of the kids. The key is [that] it has to get under their skin. There is a huge issue in getting that into organisations. You have to punch holes in the organisations too.'

Importantly, respondents felt that this aspect of the work should be integrated into a wider reflective learning framework, in which honesty about both successes and failures could also contribute actively as part of wider professional learning and accountability.

3.10 Summary observations and recommendations

a. Paramilitarism remains a contested concept in Northern Ireland. Both loyalist and republican communities have been shaped by embedded narratives of armed struggle and/or defence of the community by armed groups for many generations. Both the presence of armed groups and young people joining them has a degree of 'historic tradition', even 'normality', in families and communities. This gives groups outside the law an unusual depth and continuity as well as a tradition, however tenuously, of claiming political purpose. Tackling armed violence in Northern Ireland therefore means tackling something that is treated as integrated, traditional and 'normal', and part of the community fabric and infrastructure, not something that is distinct, separate and exceptional. While other parts of the UK and Ireland have known aspects of this, and many have had youth gangs or local 'ethnic' groups, none of them lived through this phenomenon for so long, and nowhere has it impacted on everyday community life and politics for over a century. Anyone working with paramilitarism is therefore working in an unusual political context, in which personal history and local 'tradition' have combined to create a degree of 'normality' - even acceptability - around the presence and use of violence for political ends.

In 1998, however, all of the main political parties, including those associated with armed groups, accepted that violence has no place in solving political disputes, that the rule of law should apply everywhere and that paramilitary groups should disband. In theory, this represents a watershed political consensus that any armed activity is no longer 'political' but is instead 'violence' and therefore criminal. Twenty years later, however, armed activity in communities continues- albeit at a reduced level - usually associating itself with the political traditions of the past. Young people in deprived communities are in the frontline of this activity, both as perpetrators and victims.

Models of practice to address violence developed elsewhere cannot therefore simply be 'lifted' and applied without reference to this historical and social context.

- b. This study confirms that there are numerous examples of efforts to prevent armed-group violence in democratic societies across the world, are dedicated to preventing gang violence and/or enabling members to leave and integrate into mainstream society. Youth work approaches, specifically of relationship building, providing alternative services, counselling, support for employment and education, mediation and persistent targeting of those most at risk-have been an essential element in these efforts. The most successful are those which offer a genuine alternative path and support to reach it.

Consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 2250, the contribution of youth work is a commitment to young people and their participation and a refusal to engage in 'moral panic', while at the same time recognising that violence and conflict shapes and distorts young lives disproportionately to the lives of the wider community. The evidence from this study shows a surprising degree of consensus about the priorities of youth work to address violence by groups in communities:

- De-glamorisation violence with restorative principles;
- There is no single formula: work has to be street by street and person-
- centred;
- Mentor- and Peer -approaches to change are critical. Relationships are the core of the work;
- Success requires persistence and commitment to the young person, especially those most at risk because of trauma and marginalisation;
- Local people are critical (both in support and in change);
- Authentic and honest engagement with dilemmas (reflective practice);

- Youth work exists to support young people and their well-being not police problems;
 - Good youth work requires an ability to focus resources on those most in difficulties;
 - The systems supporting youth work with young people at risk have to be agile and flexible and not pre-determined or bureaucratic;
 - Where people change, this has to be acknowledged and permitted not resented.
- c. The formal commitment to tackling paramilitarism in Northern Ireland is qualified by the experience that society is much more ambivalent about taking action in practice. The ability of youth work, or any single profession, to deliver change in isolation in relation to armed groups in Northern Ireland is limited by:
- Perceived continuing ambivalence in political leadership and communities about tackling paramilitarism that creates uncertainty and risk for those working with young people;
 - Organisations such as councils, police, housing or community development seldom name tackling paramilitarism as a corporate goal, and much of the work still depends on individuals willing to take risks.
 - At a professional level the specific contribution and responsibility of youth work towards young people and their relationship to armed groups is not clear. There are currently inadequate systems of professional support, insufficient training, and inflexible sources of protection and finance. Anyone charged professionally with tackling paramilitarism at local level without unambiguous support is perceived to be immediately at risk. This has not substantially changed since 1998;
 - There is inconsistency in the wider community about the role of law and order (retributive) and personal and community (restorative) approaches in dealing with violence leading to a lack of consistent narrative;

- Funders appear to treat tackling paramilitarism as a short-term delivery target rather than a major culture-change project requiring the development of cultures of trust, collaboration, co-design and co-delivery. There is a need to move away from short-term 'delivery' models, to one which measures long-term and sustainable changes in culture, reflected in the lives of young people;
 - There are few opportunities for honest dialogue about challenges, opportunities and risks on these themes between young people, local communities, youth workers and political leaders or public agencies with responsibilities. A working culture, which penalises mistakes rather than learns from mistakes is counter-productive in a context of risk. There is a requirement for opportunities for reflective learning and support for a transformative practice for youth workers.
- d. Change will depend on addressing the identified challenges and embedding the values and practice of supporting young people to escape violence in the practice of youth workers, requiring a transformation in training, community expectations and attitudes and professional support.

3.11 Recommendations

1. The Tackling Paramilitarism programme should lead a wider social and political conversation to seek greater clarity about terminology within the programme, including a discussion of the complexity of tackling paramilitarism and the variety of different phenomena which are currently encapsulated in a single term. This should inform the development of appropriate interventions and outcomes, as well as expectations and measurements of change.

2. The value of youth work intervention in relation to armed groups can only be fully realised if there are clear pathways for collaborative working with other agencies. The Youth Service should consider hosting a quarterly meeting of other stakeholders and policy-holders focussing on 'Tackling Paramilitarism for Youth' as a vehicle for enhancing learning across sectors, sharing resources and identifying common priorities. At minimum these forums should include councils, education, police and community health agencies. As part of a Policing with the Community approach to Tackling Paramilitarism, the PSNI and youth service should develop clear protocols for youth workers and police officers on formal collaboration, to enable clear pathways to support safeguarding. This could also explore opportunities for a triage system, perhaps including community mental health services, to enable appropriate response to issues of young people and violence in the community. The central importance of pastoral care and mental health support was a consistent theme of this research. The START programme should be directly connected to mental health services, to enable fast access to mental health acute services at the point of vulnerability.
3. Addressing Paramilitarism and its impact on young people remains an undeveloped area of youth work practice. The Youth Service could establish clear opportunities for reflective learning and critical reflective practice to underpin the development of professional standards. Such a process might consider whether tackling paramilitarism and related issues of armed group violence requires specialist skills or becomes part of generic youth work in Northern Ireland.
4. Youth work practice, professional standards and training should be developed to ensure that tackling paramilitarism and all other programmes are governed by international standards of working with young people (as articulated in 'The Missing Piece'(2018)); This includes a formal commitment to:
 - mentoring and positive relationships , including one-to one mentoring for those most at risk. This could include the establishment of formal training for Mediation, Diversion and Advocacy
 - recreating and maintaining 'social bridges' between young people and their communities, working alongside others.

- Designing and making available a variety of tools for youth workers engaging those most at risk, including the potential of group work, diversionary activities and the role of sport, entertainment and the arts.
 - An identified role for youth workers in identifying issues of personal well-being and pathways for signposting young people to appropriate wellbeing and mental health support.
 - Exploration of gender and the appropriate interventions relating to this particular issue.
 - Education or employment are widely seen as crucial elements in sustaining the transition of a young person away from harmful behaviour and influences. The Tackling Paramilitarism programme should ensure that these pathways are available and integrated with broader youth work approaches.
5. Youth work programmes are committed to working towards reducing exposure to trauma, and risk of any further harm to participants within traumatised communities. Youth work agencies should continue to explore the potential of Restorative Practices, Trauma-informed approaches to practice, and the potential for public health approaches to violence reduction to enhance youth work, and integrate learning into professional training and development.
6. One of the most important concepts emerging from this research was 'relentless outreach' to young people at risk. There was widespread support among workers for diverting resources to those most at risk. While this concept was seen as vital in establishing commitment to some of the most marginalised, it was also recognised that successful outreach was emotionally and physically challenging for workers. To enable this, the Youth service should establish clear mechanisms to support workers in this difficult and pioneering area, where workers may feel isolated or under stress. Youth workers should have clear support within their line-management structure within which sometimes difficult judgements can be considered and supported and have the capacity to draw on external support and planned respite if required.

7. Like all statutory and community services, youth work depends on the rule of law. The role of youth work in addressing paramilitarism arises from a particular application of the duty to safeguard young people from risks which have a more universal application including violence, serious criminality and coercive control. While the nature of the risk in armed groups is specific, it is ultimately a development of an existing role. Consideration should be given to the articulation of a Professional Duty which applies to all youth work and is not simply the domain of the START workers.
8. A meaningful youth work contribution to tackling paramilitarism in communities will not be achieved unless youth work is resourced to sustain the work over a meaningful period of time. Relationship-based work requires sustained engagement. Long term success will require resource planning for a 5-10 year programme.
9. Approaches to tackling paramilitarism rooted in voluntary engagement, alternative pathways and supporting transition, such as youth, social development and trauma-informed approaches are necessarily distinct from enforcement-based approaches, through policing and criminal justice on the other. Youth work programmes can only contribute to the overall programme if youth participation remains voluntary rather than mandatory. The ways in which each can and should contribute to the outcome of the Tackling Paramilitarism programme is distinctive, and it would be helpful if the expectations of how each method is applied and complements each other could be clarified by the Programme Board, and used to develop clearer measures and indicators of success and how each contributes to outcomes.
10. At the same time, the specific focus on supporting young people 'at risk' or involved in armed groups in this programme can easily be lost in 'general principles of good youth work' unless there is clear understanding of purpose and measurement and strong professional support and guidance for workers. Youth work should develop new methods to gather information on change and development. This includes qualitative measures which indicate how apparent micro-developments are sometimes major achievements for young people. Clarifying expectations at programme and professional level, and developing a clearer understanding of the range of possible

interventions and measures of success would be an important contribution to professional development in this area. These should be presented in such a way as to contribute to outcomes-based accountability.

11. The relation of youth workers to the police within 'Policing with the Community' should be clarified. The PSNI and youth service should develop clear protocols for youth workers and police officers on collaboration, making clear both the distinct and separate roles of the two services while enabling collaboration to support safeguarding. This might explore opportunities for a triage system to enable appropriate response to issues of young people and violence in the community.

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Full Report

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