

Serious Youth Violence – Breaking the Cycle

This case focuses on the tragic death of Mohamed (16yrs), who was stabbed in Birmingham. The review also examines the lives of nine other boys involved in serious youth violence in the city; some were victims of fatal stabbings, and some were responsible for fatal attacks. All the boys were believed to have been involved with inner-city urban street gangs.

Most of the boys had suffered significant childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences. There was an absence of positive paternal role models in their lives and in some cases, the adult males that were present, encouraged, or condoned violence. Many of the boys were known to carry knives and had known other young males who had been murdered due to knife crime and gang affiliation. Significant disruption and breakdowns in their education were common, with repeated extensive use of fixed-term and permanent exclusions from school.

For almost all the boys, partnership intervention attempted to break the cycle and divert them from gang affiliation and criminal exploitation, however the pull of “Place” i.e. their local neighbourhood, meant they were still exposed to risks. There were missed opportunities to engage better with some of the boys at crisis points; these ‘reachable moments’ included when they had been excluded, stabbed, arrested, or returned home after being missing.

Good Practice

Local mentorship was offered by a range of organisations and showed positive outcomes with some of the boys. The mentors engaged well with the boys and were able to capture their voices and gain an understanding of their lived experience.

Key Learning

- Cases would have benefitted from a lead professional to coordinate multi-agency activity for children who are at risk of serious youth violence, regardless of statutory intervention. This should have included families receiving support via Early Help.
- Engagement and support was not made available to families affected by serious youth violence.
- [Right Help, Right Time threshold guidance](#) was not used appropriately to identify risk and exposure to serious youth violence.
- Not all partners and practitioners were fully aware of the range of community-based support and mentoring services across the city, and their effectiveness in supporting children at risk of serious youth violence.
- Concerns identified by professionals about the children should have been promptly shared with partners through the [EMPOWER U Hub](#).
- Risk assessment tools focussing on exploitation may not identify the true risk of engagement in serious youth violence.

Improving Practice

- If you’re involved in safeguarding children from serious youth violence, make sure you have a comprehensive knowledge of what pathways and resources are in place.
- Be able to recognise a ‘reachable moment’ for a child involved in serious youth violence and how to start those difficult conversations. Make sure you

understand what Adverse Childhood Experiences are and how to deal with the consequences of them in a trauma informed approach way.

- Learn what ‘Place’ means to a child and how that influences their lives.
- Try to prevent exclusion where possible, as education is seen as a safe place for young people.
- Educate children early on the dangers of knives, gangs, and serious youth violence to help prevent future exploitation. The [UNICEF Rights Respecting schools](#) initiative provides a framework to raise awareness and equip children to avoid and resist exploitation.

Next Steps

- ✓ Circulate this Learning Lessons Briefing Note to all members in your team.
- ✓ Find out more about [‘Reachable Moments’](#) read our earlier Briefing Note.
- ✓ Take a look at the [Ben Kinsella Trust website](#), which provides educational resources and training for young people and parents/carers.
- ✓ Read the National Review [‘It was hard to escape’](#) published by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel.
- ✓ Familiarise yourself with Birmingham’s [Serious Violence Strategy](#).
- ✓ [Visit the BSCP website](#) for details of free Multi-Agency Training on Child Exploitation and other safeguarding topics.
- ✓ [Sign up for the Practitioners’ Webinar](#) being held on 18th June 2024, where we will explore in more detail the emerging learning from this review and tips for improving safeguarding practice.