Help us, dont give up

Tackling Gang Violence: Listening to the Experts

Off Centre Service Improvement Report

Children and young people in Hackney tell us, in their own words, about the issues leading to gang involvement and how local services can better support them in making healthier choices.

OFF CENTRE

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for better mental health

RIGHT TRACK

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Contents

'If it hadn't been for
Off Centre I would
have stayed hidden in
my room…'

'(At Off Centre) I learn
new things, reflect,
and think about them in
a different way.'

'If it wasn't for Off Centre…
I would be dead.'

'I was thinking what can
a small place
(like Off Centre) do…
nothing…
but when I came here,
they helped me.'

Forewords

Each year, around 2,500 young people seek our support for the mental health and emotional wellbeing issues that affect them. This gives us insight and information about the environmental stressors and underlying causes that bring them to us in the first place.

Talking to young people about what they'd like affords us rich information upon which to base the services we offer. Of course we cannot meet every young person's needs and we aren't the only organisation to whom young people turn for support. This gives us a moral imperative to share what they've told us about how to make the borough a better place for its young residents. Although very much a document to drive our own development, we hope that others gain valuable insight as a result of our sharing this report with you.

The report talks to the issue of gangs but what's striking is that the factors young people tell us push or pull them towards gangs share a remarkable degree of commonality to everyone's emotional needs – to belong, to feel a part of something, to feel safe and to have status.

What we are hearing is very much a call to action by young people, for us to design and deliver services that encompass youth-centred activities, practical advice, support for families and for young people's emotional wellbeing.

Young people have themselves identified that gangs "fill the gaps", providing a sense of family and belonging to some and a variety of other "pull factors" to others. It's up to us to design and deliver an alternative, in order to prevent the loss of more young people to gangs.

I'd like to finish by personally thanking the psychosocial team and each and every contributor to this thought provoking and insightful research.

Martin Williams
Chief Executive
Off Centre

This report is crucial for all of us who strive to meet the needs of young people and their families, affected by gang activities. It has captured the voices of the many young people who were interviewed on their estates over a three month period of time, and highlights what they believe to be the rationale behind much of the initial gang involvement.

This report has identified areas of risk in relation to young people's emotional wellbeing, and has recognised the impact that living in fear of attack, being in an unhappy home environment and not achieving what they have the potential to do within the educational and employment arenas can have over a long period of time .

We need to be mindful of young peoples perspectives in thinking through approaches to tackling gang-related activity, as well as in developing practice, policy and operational work.

I'd like to personally thank Off Centre for hearing the voices of young people in our local community and treating them as experts of their own lives; for working with considerable energy and creativity to provide psychosocial support in ways young people are requesting, and ultimately, for producing this report which has provided the foundations for the conference today.

It is my hope that this conference will inform practice, and provide us with a rare opportunity to consider how we can collaboratively respond in order to support our local young people in the best way possible.

Jan Stout
Chair of the Third Sector Gangs Meetings
Integrated Gangs Unit Delivery Manager for Hackney

City and Hackney Mind is pleased to co-sponsor and endorse Off Centre Young People's Counselling Service in their efforts to obtain the views of young people across Hackney. Through the course of our preliminary partnership initiative, City and Hackney Mind has been impressed with the commitment, creativity and dedication of Off Centre staff in attempting to meet the emotional, practical and aspirational needs of young people from all walks of life, in particular from the most deprived backgrounds.

With regard to young people, City and Hackney Mind is equally committed to the following actions.

— **Explicitly expanding our ethos of 'the service user being at the heart of everything we do' to the wider community, to include children, young people, and their families**
— **Supporting the voluntary sector to work more effectively and closely together to offer the best possible range of opportunities and support for young people with the ultimate aim of facilitating greater emotional health and resilience**
— **Supporting families to improve the quality of their relationships and to better handle and cope with stress, anxieties and adversity**
— **Contributing to a safer and more flourishing Hackney by: redressing inequalities, engaging young people and their families to reduce mental health stigma and by promoting greater awareness about the factors supporting mental health and wellbeing.**

City and Hackney Mind and Off Centre have entered into formal partnership to address the emotional and health needs of young people in Hackney and to address the negative consequences of family disintegration, mental and physical ill health, bullying, gang violence and affiliation, lack of employment opportunities and peer pressures.

We are starting with the premise and ethic that the voices of young people themselves are the key to ensuring that our communities flourish and that young people have access to the conditions and opportunities that will help them build resilience, overcome adversity and to develop into creative and productive adults. We adhere to point 11 of YoungMinds' Manifesto from young people, 'We're the experts; start listening to us.'

We hope you take the time to read this report and to listen carefully to what our young people in Hackney have to say about themselves, the world around them and the services that support them.

Hana Villar
Director of Clinical Services
City and Hackney Mind

'Prevention should be heavily emphasised in any strategy addressing youth gangs, yet it is probably the most neglected type of intervention. We have to figure out a way to reach youths before they get involved in gangs.'[1]

Introduction

Off Centre is a counselling, therapy, advocacy, advice and psychosocial service for young people aged between 11 and 25 who live, work or study in Hackney. As an organisation providing services to young people, we wanted to hear their voices on issues they felt were important for us to address.

To supplement evidence from young people already engaged with our services, at the end of 2012 we undertook a more rigorous consultation involving outreach, surveys and in-depth interviews. One of the main issues that regularly came up was gang violence and this is the primary focus of this report.

The report was written for the purposes of internal service improvement and not as a research document. We are not experts in the area of gang involvement. Instead, we come from the perspective of an organisation that works with young people affected by these issues with a particular focus on addressing emotional wellbeing.

We have therefore not spent time defining what a 'gang' is, or debating the pros and cons of various international intervention models for tackling gang activity. Our focus is on young people at the first stage of risk and on early intervention, with the intention of using this report to create programmes that effectively meet young people's needs and improve their life outcomes.

In order to frame our findings within an appropriate context, this report first provides an introduction to Off Centre, our aims and the work of our psychotherapy and psychosocial teams.

It gives a brief history of gang issues in Hackney and includes some demographic information from two of the postcode areas where we undertook consultation exercises to contextualise the social environment that these young people grow up in.

In order to demonstrate how gang involvement comes about for an individual, the report offers a case example of one of our mentors, Kerim, who was previously involved in gang activity.

We then provide a basic description of the methodology used to analyse the feedback young people gave us before exploring young people's voices on issues that matter to them. Commentaries and images of direct feedback are sometimes provided to accompany key points.

Drawing from the consultation, we will summarise the environmental and emotional risks associated with involvement in gang activities, and the additional factors we are aware of that promote resilience on an individual level. We then explore the generic impact of these environmental stressors as we see them in our therapeutic work with young people at Off Centre.

In keeping with our focus on service improvement, we provide a summary of the issues, outlining the action we have already taken in response to young people's voices and our aims for the future.

We believe that this research is unique in the borough of Hackney and wanted to share young people's voices on gang violence, as well as our experience of working with them, with our local partner organisations. We hope that this will lead to useful and coordinated responses for the young people we are all dedicated to supporting.

Off Centre's history and structure

Our founder, Patsy Paice, started Off Centre in 1974 from a derelict house in London Fields that had a stripped off roof and was flooded throughout. Patsy wasn't initially welcomed by the local community:

> " There was outright hostility from some people in the borough at first. But we had a good response from schools and from the young people themselves who were determined to find better lives for themselves. They just needed the support. "

In the first year just 13 people used Off Centre. Now, in our 39th year, more than 2,500 of Hackney's young people seek our support annually. In order to continue to respond to young people's changing needs, our organisation has itself changed and developed over time. In many ways, the young people of 2013 have different service requirements to the young people of 1974, while in other respects some of the support needs they require have remained constant. We remain committed to adapting our service in response to the voices of young people in our community. Primarily, we are dedicated to improving the emotional wellbeing of Hackney's young people through providing the psychological support they require, in ways they'd like us to.

Off Centre houses two teams; the psychotherapy and the psychosocial team. This report mainly answers questions the psychosocial team had about how to better support young people at risk of gang involvement. the team had about how to better support young people at risk of gang involvement. Both teams provide support for young people aged 11 to 25 years old who live, study or work in the London Borough of Hackney. Young people can be seen at the Off Centre building in Hackney Central or at other recognised satellite venues, subject to health & safety and risk assessment screening. Referrals to both teams are usually accepted directly from young people themselves or professionals working with them with the young person's consent.

The psychotherapy team offers all young people an initial contract of twelve sessions, which allows opportunities for clients to explore the main issues in their lives and to see how therapy might assist them. The initial length of contract is set following discussion within our clinical meetings or with Senior Practitioners and reviewed every six sessions with the client. Where an extension beyond 24 sessions is needed,

the rationale is presented to the Assistant Director. Standard therapeutic contracts range between:

6 sessions = brief
12 sessions = short
24 session = long

We recognise that attitudes in society towards young people are often negative, fearful or over controlling. We believe that this adds to the difficulties vulnerable, disadvantaged or socially excluded young people face. We have developed a commitment to the following values, which are integral to the service we provide:

- We work with young people as equal partners and experts of their own lives and respond to each young person's individual needs.
- We pay rigorous attention to the relationship between the worker and the young person, ensuring that the relationship is built on integrity, trust, reliability and safety.
- Within our work we respond with respect to each young person's needs.
- We value and respect the differences between us as individuals and as groups of people who share similar experiences, identities and backgrounds.
- We have a commitment to understanding what the world is like from the point of view of the young people who use our services.
- It will always be a young person's choice to use our services.
- We recognise that we cannot meet all young people's needs all of the time, and will signpost to other services where we feel they could do so better.
- We take seriously our client's interpretation of their needs and we provide opportunities for young people to get involved in shaping our services.

The psychotherapy service has been at the core of Off Centre for the past 39 years. However, a growing body of evidence demonstrates that young people find it less stigmatising to receive support in their own communities and through people they already know and trust.[2] This knowledge, twinned with an awareness of the increase in mental health difficulties locally and a drive towards involving young people in the design and delivery of our services in order to best meet their changing needs, led us to the development of our psychosocial team three years ago.

The Psychosocial Team

We know from existing research that responding to psychosocial needs significantly reduces emotional difficulties caused by environmental stressors as well as potentially supporting therapeutic work through increasing young people's resilience.[3] Factors that increase resilience have been well synthesised by numerous researchers over the past decade.

One useful framework is the 'Emotional Need Audit' (ENA).[4] This offers a useful summary for the purposes of screening for risk and providing interventions that can build resilience in psychosocial work.[5] The Psychosocial Team have designed a diagram to capture the elements outlined as being important in the ENA (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1   Areas of need that can (if met) increase emotional resilience

Many of the areas above can be broken down further and cover a range of diverse needs within them. For example, the need for autonomy and control may include the need for financial advice, welfare and benefit information, legal advice, careers advice, skill development, CV writing or involvement in advocacy work to bring about social change. The need for one close relationship may include complex work around reparative attachment, or may result in the provision of a positive role-model to dissuade young people from making choices that would impact on their other needs negatively. The need for community involvement may be a need to reduce social isolation, to engage with positive activities, to find an area they can excel in which would

in turn increase their ability to gain skill and status from others.

One can see that these macro categories also contain micro groupings, and when these are met, there is often a positive impact on young people's lives in general. These needs, which are known to increase resilience in regard to emotional wellbeing, are often what we see missing in young people who present at Off Centre.

The psychosocial team aim to meet the needs to:

- **feel respected**
- **have a sense of community**
- **have autonomy and control in one area of life**
- **receive positive attention from others**
- **give positive attention to others**
- **have privacy (including safety)**
- **be challenged and stretched**
- **have a balanced diet and get regular exercise**
- **have one close relationship**
- **have status and meaning in life.**

The psychosocial team meets these needs in a variety of ways and in response to what has been requested through consultation, outreach and social research with young people in our target areas. We *care* and this in itself makes a significant difference to the young people we work with. We show this through our flexibility of working style to meet their needs, our willingness to support them in all the holistic areas of their lives, and to have an open door policy; allowing them to self refer and select how they would like to engage in our service so that it feels right for them. The Psychosocial team demonstrate this through our partnership working style which, as much as possible, (within a support service) promotes empowerment and equality.

With a participation model of treating our young people as experts of their own lives and current circumstances, we listen to their voices so that we have a better understanding of what brought them to us, and how we can help. We respond to this accordingly, supporting them in achieving what it is they feel they can gain from us, and assisting them in moving forward with their lives.

If a young person's mental health needs are acute, we will make a referral to the psychotherapy service and work alongside the young person to provide dual support where appropriate, or keep them as an open case for when the therapist feels they are ready to be referred back in to the psychosocial team. Many staff at Off Centre straddle the two teams, further ensuring that young people come first, that support is needs based, and that the transition between the teams is smooth. Partnership working with the therapy team will assist the therapeutic process by increasing resilience and the therapeutic support offered is likely to assist the psychosocial team because the young person will be more able to engage with opportunities which, in turn,

is likely to lead to their needs being met. All partnership work would be based on risk assessments and individual presentations.

It tends to be the case that those with more acute need, but not enough to be referred to the psychotherapeutic team, would be offered a place with the nurture group, activity group, 1:1 therapy, drama therapy or access to our advice and information service. Those with medium-level needs would potentially be involved in our activity groups, participation group, mentoring groups and advice and information service. Those with low-level needs would be offered involvement opportunities with the participation team, volunteering opportunities, training to develop their career choices, and mentoring as well as advice and information a range of issues, such as housing, benefits and employment.

In line with a participation approach, young people have a voice in what this looks like and how the service is delivered to ensure it is accessible and a 'good fit' for them. The diagram (Fig. 2) illustrates the standard involvement processes that young people are likely to have with the psychosocial team, and what we offer.
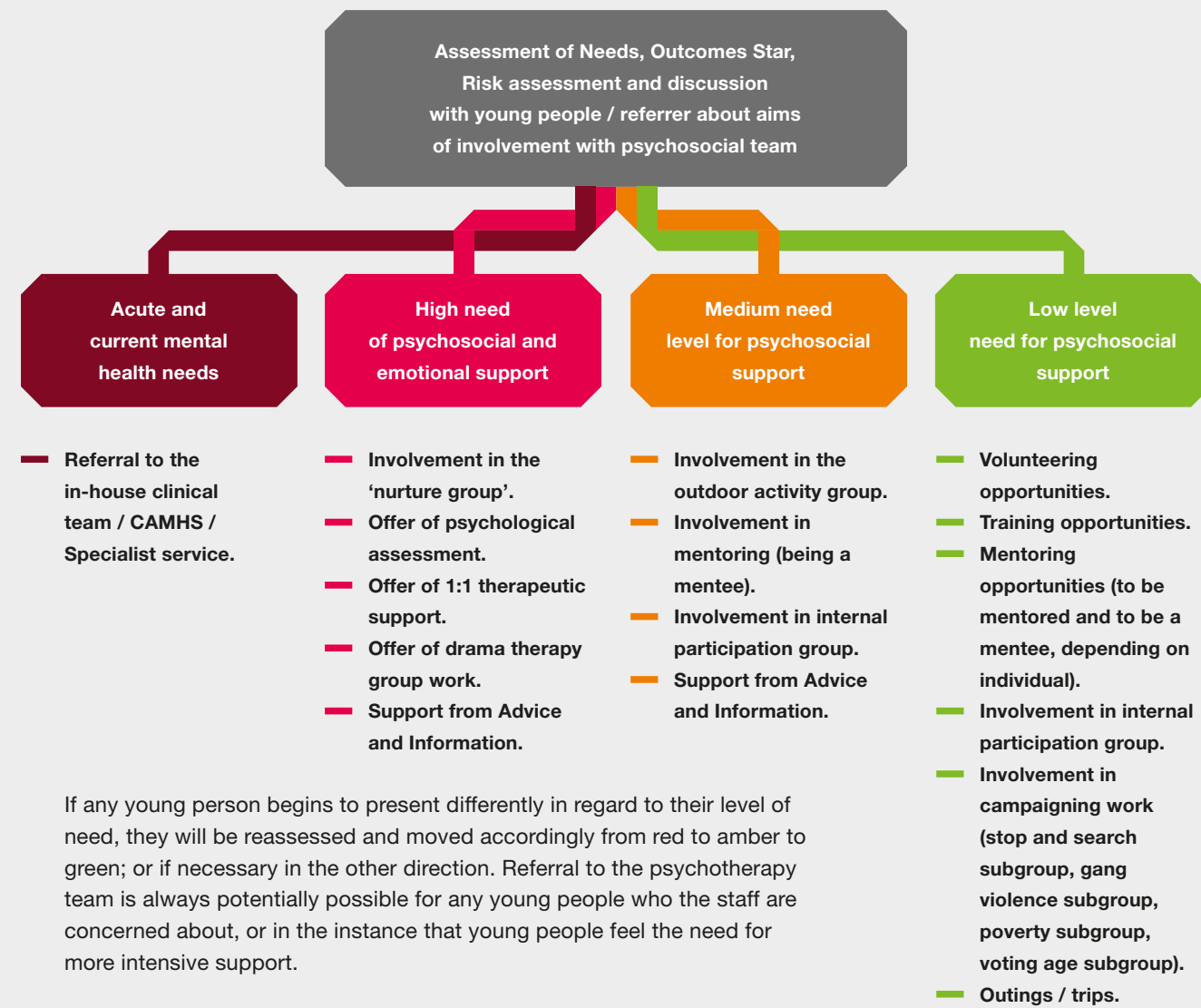
Assessment of Needs, Outcomes Star, Risk assessment and discussion with young people / referrer about aims of involvement with psychosocial team

Acute and current mental health needs	High need of psychosocial and emotional support	Medium need level for psychosocial support	Low level need for psychosocial support

Acute and current mental health needs
- Referral to the in-house clinical team / CAMHS / Specialist service.

High need of psychosocial and emotional support
- Involvement in the 'nurture group'.
- Offer of psychological assessment.
- Offer of 1:1 therapeutic support.
- Offer of drama therapy group work.
- Support from Advice and Information.

Medium need level for psychosocial support
- Involvement in the outdoor activity group.
- Involvement in mentoring (being a mentee).
- Involvement in internal participation group.
- Support from Advice and Information.

Low level need for psychosocial support
- Volunteering opportunities.
- Training opportunities.
- Mentoring opportunities (to be mentored and to be a mentee, depending on individual).
- Involvement in internal participation group.
- Involvement in campaigning work (stop and search subgroup, gang violence subgroup, poverty subgroup, voting age subgroup).
- Outings / trips.

If any young person begins to present differently in regard to their level of need, they will be reassessed and moved accordingly from red to amber to green; or if necessary in the other direction. Referral to the psychotherapy team is always potentially possible for any young people who the staff are concerned about, or in the instance that young people feel the need for more intensive support.

Fig. 2   Generic entry routes through the psychosocial team at Off Centre

A needs audit, the outcomes star model, various psychometric tests and a qualitative interview at entry and exit points give us feedback on how effective our intervention has been.

Our hope is that young people's voices and stories in relation to gang involvement will help us develop our programmes to offer young people increased choice and assist them in developing a path towards improved life opportunities.

Gang activity and impact
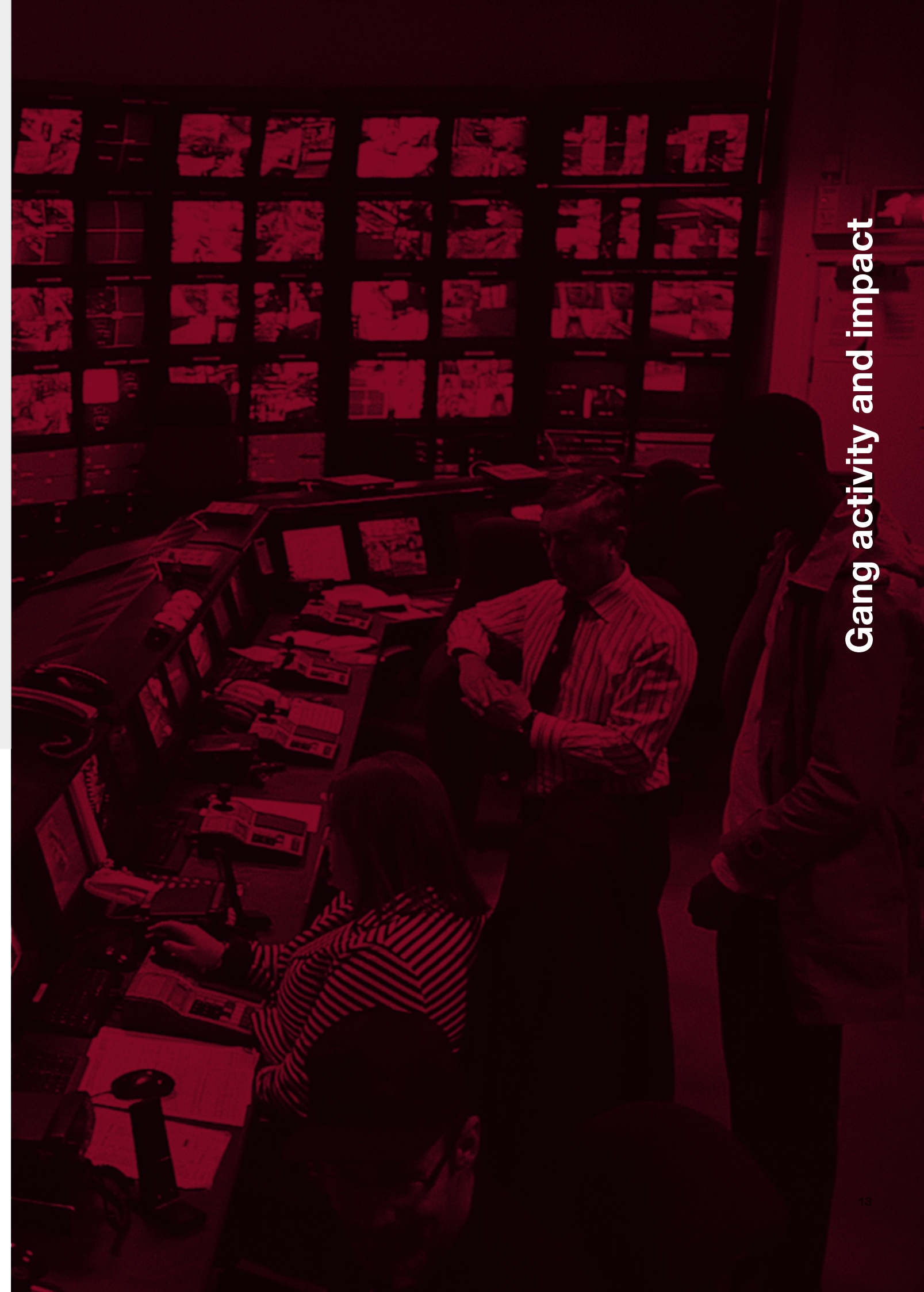
Gang-related issues and socioeconomic stressors

Between 2005 and 2010, Hackney featured fourth among eight other boroughs of London with the highest number of gang-related homicides. In late 2006, Hackney was identified as one of three boroughs with the most gangs operating.[6]

There are 22 distinct gangs within the borough of Hackney. Most of these are long-standing, durable and currently active. There are several smaller gangs that have either been active in the past and have now been assimilated into a larger neighbour, or have never been anything other than a small group within the territory of one of the main gangs (and may consider themselves to be part of that gang). These groups tend to exist on the smaller estates within the gang territory (e.g. the Pembury gang territory, which covers the Mother's Square estate, is home to a small group who are known to refer to themselves as the 'Mother's Square' gang, and several members heavily associate with Pembury).

There are over 1,500 individuals who are known to be either directly involved in gang activity, or who are closely linked to gangs or their members. The vast majority of these are males, aged between 13 and 30. Membership of each gang ranges from approximately 30–100+ individuals. The most established and longest standing gangs tend to have the largest membership.

The oft-quoted 'postcode wars,' whilst being a convenient term for headlines is misleading, at least when applied to Hackney. Territory is certainly one of the main driving forces behind violence between gangs, but this is not solely defined by postcode. Gang activity operates on a smaller scale, with boundaries sometimes being defined by a particular estate and/or the roads immediately surrounding it. This means that there is frequently inter-post code tension.

There are rival gangs within each of the following postcodes; E2, E5, E8, E9, N16.

Many gangs in Hackney have also formed alliances to gangs in other postcode areas within the borough. For example:

London Fields (E8) **– Gilpin Square**(E5) **– Lordship** (N16)
Hoxton (N1) **– Holly Street** (E8) **– Fellows Court** (E2)
Kingshold, Ballance (E9) **– Pembury** (E5)

Bearing in mind the discussion above in regard to inter-postcode rivalry, the main postcode areas that define gang territory (where they regularly associate due to their alliances) can be seen in the following list, and thereafter, in Map 1 (Fig3).
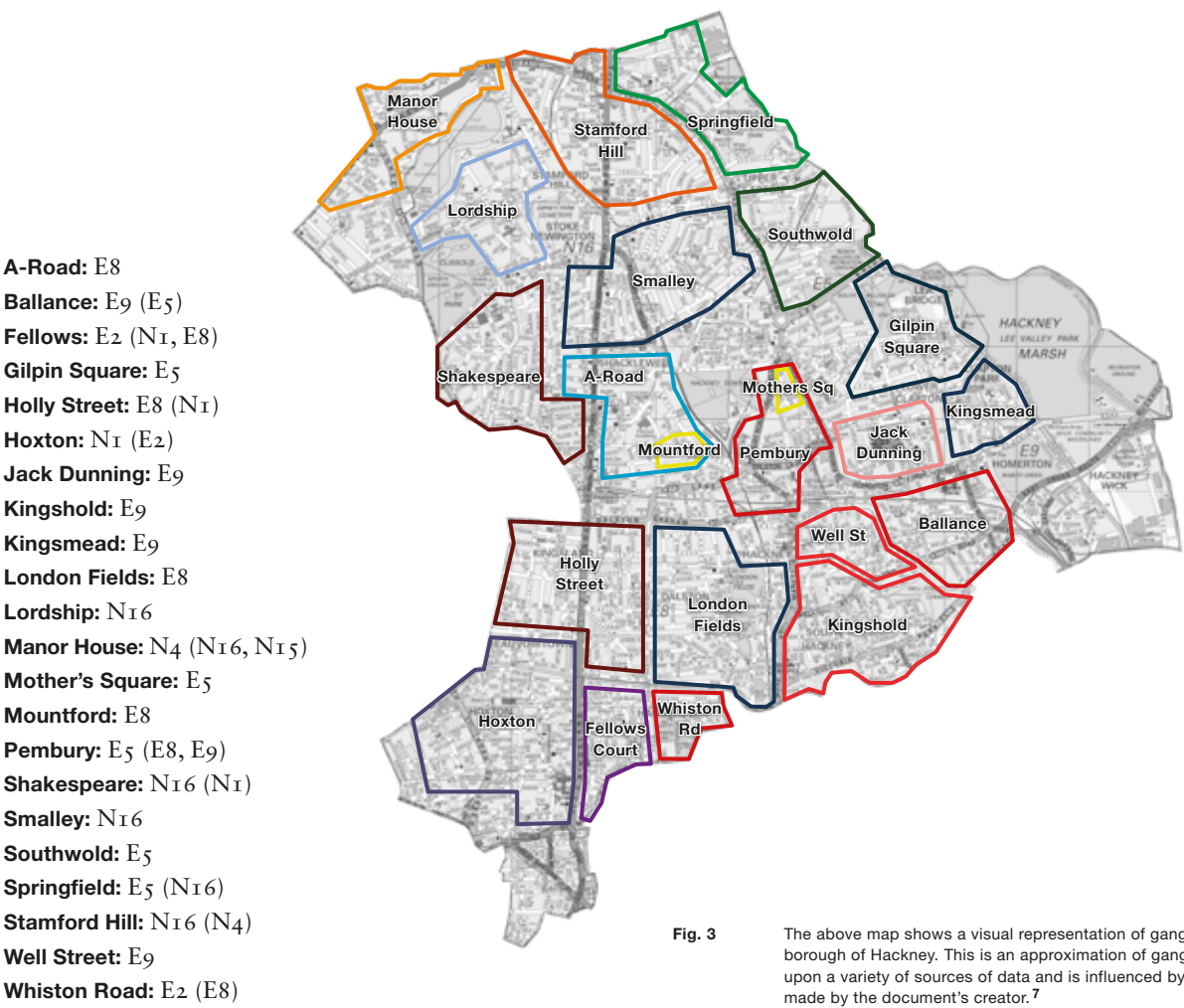
A-Road: E8
Ballance: E9 (E5)
Fellows: E2 (N1, E8)
Gilpin Square: E5
Holly Street: E8 (N1)
Hoxton: N1 (E2)
Jack Dunning: E9
Kingshold: E9
Kingsmead: E9
London Fields: E8
Lordship: N16
Manor House: N4 (N16, N15)
Mother's Square: E5
Mountford: E8
Pembury: E5 (E8, E9)
Shakespeare: N16 (N1)
Smalley: N16
Southwold: E5
Springfield: E5 (N16)
Stamford Hill: N16 (N4)
Well Street: E9
Whiston Road: E2 (E8)

Fig. 3 The above map shows a visual representation of gang territory in the borough of Hackney. This is an approximation of gang territory based upon a variety of sources of data and is influenced by inferences made by the document's creator.[7]

The map above shows a visual representation of gang territory in the borough of Hackney. This is an approximation of gang territory based upon a variety of sources of data and is influenced by inferences made by the document's creator.

Signs of gang affiliation are often visual. Gang members in Hackney frequently wear blue and red bandanas and there is a clear split between the groups using these colours. This is heavily influenced by American gang culture; specifically the 'Bloods' and 'Crips' gangs, their colours being red and blue respectively. Map 2 (Fig 4) demonstrates the colour coded divisions.

The 'Red' gangs centred around E9/E5 are closely linked to each other. There are also links to the gangs shown with purple/burgundy shading although not on the same scale. Hoxton & Fellows are closely linked together and both are friendly with Holly Street. Holly Street are closely linked to Shakespeare despite Fellows Court and parts of Hoxton being in dispute with/disliking them, particularly Fellows Court. Shakespeare & Manor House have formed close links among the younger generations of the gangs while Manor House and

Stamford Hill have been close historically but are thought to be officially 'joined' for several years under the name 'MTS' (Manor to Stamford). However, both gangs still exist in their own right. Fellows Court are known to dislike both Manor House and Stamford Hill.

The 'Blue' gangs are all either directly or indirectly linked to each other. They are either in dispute with, or at least do not associate on any meaningful level, with all the 'non-blue' gang on the borough. Their main disputes include Pembury, Ballance, Kingshold, Holly Street, Shakespeare & Fellows.

The 'Green' gangs are linked to each other. Older members of these gangs have historically had links to various Hackney gangs from before the early 2000s when the gangs were less fractured. They are not currently known to be close to any other gangs in this borough. There are many examples of relationships predating this fracturing that cross these divides. These are isolated relationships, usually among the older generations, which often have a familial link and tend not to continue on to the younger gang members.
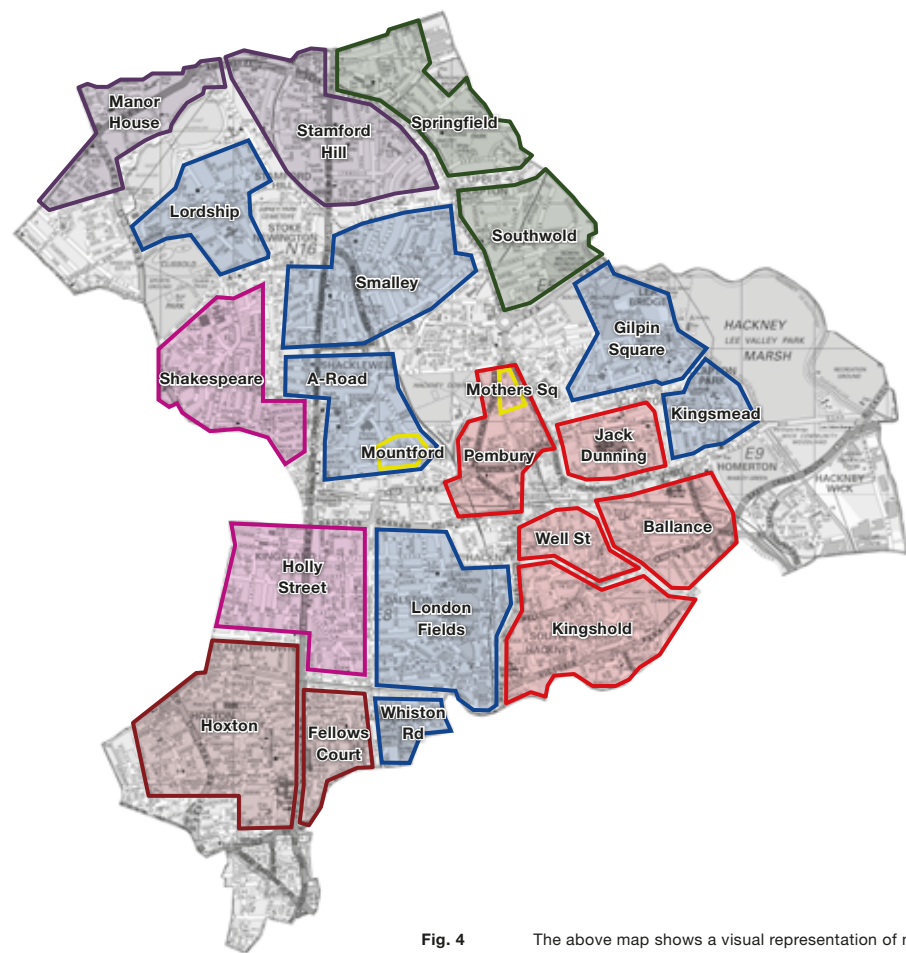
Fig. 4   The above map shows a visual representation of main gang alliances and disputes within the borough of Hackney. This is an approximation of gang territory based upon a variety of sources of data and is influenced by inferences made by the document's creator. [8]

Hackney gang members are also known to have tattoos of their gang's name (both full and abbreviated versions), postcodes relevant to the gang, phrases particular to an individual or group of gangs and also their nicknames. The young people heavily identify with postcodes and particular estates / roads / areas which give many their name; for example Pembury Estate, Ballance Road, Stamford Hill and London Fields for example. Besides clothing in the particular colour of each gang, there are numerous examples of gang members producing T-shirts, hats, and hooded tops that bear the gang's name, their nickname or other relevant signifying logos or characters. Jewellery is seen on a much smaller scale but some examples do exist and have been seen.

Gang membership can also be noted through body language. Hand signs are used to represent gang names, and the postcodes that make up their territory. They are usually used to show membership and allegiance, but can also be used to show 'disrespect' towards other gang members. For example, many gangs on the borough invert the London Fields 'Ls up' sign, becoming 'Ls down', to show their dislike of the

gang. Phrases particular to individual or groups of friendly gangs are also prevalent. Examples include:

— **9-5/NTF = E9 to E5. These are the postcodes of the constituent gangs (Ballance, Pembury, Kingshold and Well Street) within this group**
— **ABG = Used mainly by Ballance Road but also some members of the 9-5 group to represent 'Anti blue gang' and 'Ambitions beyond greatness' among others**
— **CSR = Certified Southwold Road/Certified Southwold Rider, used by the Southwold gang. Other gangs use similar terminology CBR (Ballance), CWS (Well Street) etc.**

In addition to this, YouTube is used extensively by the gangs to post videos of themselves rapping. The content of these videos are generally based on insulting other gangs and/or boasting about their lifestyles. The videos are a mixture of poor-quality self-made efforts and 'paid for' professional videos, filmed by several well known companies. Mix-tapes are sometimes released by gang members, containing the same lyrical content as the videos.

The history of gang issues in Hackney raises the risk of 'intergenerational transmission of a territorial culture.'[9] Perhaps unsurprisingly, evidence also demonstrates a strong inter-relationship between territorial behavior and disadvantaged areas. Gangs and territorial youth groups have often been found predominantly in, or originating from, multiply deprived settings and socially disorganized neighborhoods.[10]

For Hackney in general:

— **93 of Hackney's 137 super output areas (68%) are in the 10% most deprived areas in the whole of England, with many featuring in the 5% most deprived. [11]**
— **It is the second youngest London borough after Newham (25% of the population is under 18). [12]**
— **only 28.9% of young people in Hackney vote, which compares with a national average of 72%, demonstrating some degree of political disengagement. [13]**
— **20% of the population of Hackney have no education/ qualifications [14]**
— **37% of households are below 60% of the median income [15]**
— **70% experience deprivation in education, health, employment, housing, and health [16]**

London Fields (Queensbridge Ward)
Using the Index of Multiple Deprivation to gauge the level of deprivation across several domains including employment, income, health, education and crime, it is apparent that much of Hackney falls into super output areas (SOAs) classified as being among the 20% most deprived in the country. All seven SOAs in Queensbridge ward rank among the 20% most deprived nationally.

Socioeconomic profiles show Queensbridge to be lower than any other of the Hackney wards. The Queensbridge ward demographics from Government office profiling show that qualifications are lower, and more people are unemployed or economically inactive than in the general population of Hackney. Less than half the working age population is in work. Residents in the Queensbridge ward also have higher levels of poor health and limiting long-term illness. London Fields has a particularly large cohort of 0–14 year olds and there have been significant increases in drugs and sexual offences in recent years. The area has higher crime rates than the borough average and London Fields in particular has been connected with some notable instances of gun crime. E8 is the postcode area for the London Fields Gang.

Pembury Estate (Hackney Central Ward)
The Pembury Estate (in the Hackney Central Ward) similarly has all of its seven SOAs ranking amongst the 20% most deprived nationally. Social housing is dominant in Hackney Central, accounting for around 56% of tenure, and the ward has higher than average rates of unemployment and disability. Hackney Central itself ranks as the 35th most deprived ward in London.[17] The levels of violent crime, in particular, are higher than in other areas in Hackney. Activity related to the Pembury Boys and media headlines over the last two years, featuring stories such as: *'Teens Wounded In Pembury Estate Knife Attack'*[18], *'Hackney riots have crushed the Pembury estate community'*[19], *'Teenager dies in London street shooting'*[20], and *'Sterling sub-machine gun found stashed near children's playground'*[21], have contributed to the fear of gang violence locally.

Driven by the knowledge that the effects of violence cost the UK economy in the region of £124 billion annually,[22] the Institute for Economics and Peace wrote a detailed report analysing socio-economic factors associated with peacefulness (as defined by the absence of violence or fear of violence) in the UK from 2003 to 2012. Although 278 Local Authorities of 343 have become more peaceful during this time with a significant reduction of homicides, Hackney was rated 3rd in the least peaceful category in England and Wales, with a violent crime rate across a decade at more than twice the national average.[23] The report used various indicators to determine levels of 'peace'. In regard to the 'violent crime indicator', Hackney came out as 'worst' across England and Wales. In 2004, the 'weapons crime' rate was four times the national average. It may be of interest to note that across the 32 London boroughs, poverty or low income played the greatest role in determining levels of peacefulness. It may be of interest to note that social exclusion, lack of employment opportunities and lack of affordable housing were cited amongst the key reasons for the 2011 riots.

Kerim

Kerim was born in Germany before coming to live in the UK with his parents at the age of four. Since arriving in London, Kerim has lived in the same house with both of his parents; his German mother and Spanish father. During Kerim's childhood his father was unemployed and Kerim does not recall doing activities with him or his father being a positive role model. Although Kerim had three uncles in the London area, he rarely saw them when he was growing up. His main caregiver was his mum with whom he had a good relationship and felt close to.

During Kerim's time at primary school, he remembers having a good time and participating in school teams, particularly football. Kerim recalls his male football coach as being a positive influence on his life and describes him as being down to earth; a person who all the young people would get along with and everyone respected because he was 'on a level' with the young people. At a young age, Kerim had aspirations of becoming a footballer or a fireman when he grew up. Connexions supported Kerim in his choices, helping him to get onto a course that allowed him to play football for a local team while attending college and studying for a BTEC in sports and exercise. This is what Kerim was doing at the time of his arrest.

In the area where Kerim lived, playing out on the street and in the local park was what the kids did; hanging out with mates, kicking a ball around. Kerim described the social structure being divided into two groups: the younger ones (who were between 11 and 13 years of age) and the older ones (who were between 18 and 20 years of age). The younger ones were naturally curious about the older ones but Kerim was not aware of any formal initiation to join a gang.

Things became more serious for Kerim in Year 10. At this time, he was attending a school situated in a different postcode to his own. Kerim described how he had never had issues within school prior to this point and had always had many friends. However, after school older boys began to come looking for him with the intention of picking a fight. Kerim would fight to 'defend his postcode' and felt proud to do this. When he returned home injured or bruised he would lie to his mum saying that he had been protecting himself because he was being bullied.

Around the time this was going on, one of the 'older ones' from Kerim's postcode area started to come and pick him up from school in his car. This offered Kerim the protection he felt he needed. From this time he began hanging out with the 'older ones' more. Kerim described how he always felt welcome among them. As he hung out with them he began to hear, in detail, about what was happening and he became wiser in relation to disputes and how the 'older ones' made money.

For Kerim there was no initial pull into a 'gang'. Kerim does not perceive it in this way. It was more about friends helping him out. For Kerim, hanging out with the 'older ones' wasn't about earning money but being in it for the "reputation and to impress girls". Eventually, Kerim began working for the 'older ones' which he implied meant that they supported him to deal drugs around the area. When an 'older' was sent to jail, Kerim looked after his business for him. Kerim was unusually young to be in this position. People knew of him by name from outside his postcode area, and they knew that he made a lot of money. He became aware that he was a target, so he would always take a knife with him when he left home in order to defend himself.

Kerim was continuing with college at this time. One day when he was returning from college he was confronted by three youths in his local park. He did not recognise the boys because they wore hoods and had covered their faces with bandanas so as only to reveal their eyes. He cautioned them that they were in the wrong area to be threatening him, and tried to warn them off. Kerim saw one of the boys reach into his pocket and he drew out his own knife. During the confrontation Kerim stabbed one of the boys in the sternum. The other two boys ran off, leaving their friend bleeding on the ground. At this point Kerim realised that he could kill the injured boy if he stabbed him again. However instead he picked up his college bag and walked home.

He described how he felt nothing. This feeling of numbness extends back to Kerim's early years. He doesn't recall being affected by anything much, other than seeing his mum upset. However, this was the first time he'd acted aggressively. The day the police came to his house to arrest him for attempted murder, his mum initially assumed they had the wrong person. Kerim had kept everything from her to prevent her from becoming upset.

The secure attachment to his mother was ultimately the turning point for Kerim. He had asked her not to visit him while he was serving his sentence, so he was as surprised to see her as she was to discover that her son had been put on 'closed visits' for three months because he had attacked another person in the visiting room in the previous week. This meant she was only able to visit him with a glass wall dividing the two of them and she was visibly upset at not being able to have any physical contact with him. This triggered a deep realisation for Kerim that his actions had consequences on another; his mum. He did not want to keep putting her through this and witnessing the distress he saw in her eyes that day. After his mum's visit he decided to turn his life around.

When he was sentenced, Kerim had assumed that life as he knew it was over. He had seen others before him go in and out of prison and thought that he would follow the same pattern from then on. He described how, even as a much younger child at school, he remembered being told that if you have a criminal record then you can't get a job. The police had echoed this when he was first arrested and taken to his local station. He felt his life was over once he had a record because there was no longer any opportunity of getting a 'mainstream job'.

Kerim's experience of jail was predictably difficult, he witnessed people being terrorised and bullied, mainly in order to get money to buy snacks and treats from the canteen. Kerim knew that many people self harmed and were depressed as a result of spending hours in their rooms. After Kerim's decision to turn his life around, he was asked to offer the new admissions some peer support. He accepted, and would answer their questions when they came in. Kerim understood that having people they could relate to and who had shared the journey could make a change in their lives also. This role also gave him more opportunities, and opened up the possibility of him being employed when he finished his sentence. He is now a paid mentor at Off Centre, steering young people away from gang involvement and providing them with a powerful role model.

In terms of prevention, Kerim believes that targeting the 'young ones' and offering positive role models from the beginning means that they won't get caught up in gang life. For the ones who are already involved he feels that giving them support and hearing what the young person has to say is vital. Kerim feels that some of the ones who are involved do want to be helped and shown an alternative path, but also said that some are just too far gone and they can't be changed or helped now.

He highlighted the importance of training and support opportunities that led directly into paid work and cited a paid apprenticeship scheme offered by Islington council as a good practice example. Kerim said young people live in the moment and want to be getting on with something and learning on the job while going to college; which is exactly what these apprenticeships offer. He said young people ideally wanted legitimate ways to earn money and move on with their life. He made the point that the average cost per year of accommodating a young person in a secure training centre is £170,000[27], and young offender institution placement costs £57,000 per child per year. Considering that 69.3% of children (10–17) released from custody reoffended with in a year,[28] he felt it may be timely to look toward alternative options and early intervention. The Institute for Economics and Peace report echoes the same message; 'Incarceration is not a cost-effective solution to reducing violence. The increase in incarceration since 1999 costs the British taxpayer an additional £881 million each year.[29]

Research methology

Participants

This research is based on feedback from eighty participants (defined as young people between eight and eighteen years of age) living in the London Borough of Hackney; specifically in E8 3NR, E9 6NR, E2 8QA, N16 9EX, N1 6HS. Some of the young people completed a questionnaire independently (see Appendix A), other participants were supported by members of staff from other projects, and a final group were interviewed verbally based on the format of the questionnaire by Off Centre staff, and later transcribed by an independent research assistant. Which group young people fell into was primarily influenced by the literacy levels of participants. Largely based on who we encountered in the outreach work, the responses were predominantly from male young people.

Analysis

All data were anonymised and stored separately and confidentially. Responses to questionnaires were recorded on IBM SPSS Statistics 20 (SPSS), a software package commonly used to analyse psychological and sociological data for academic and published research. On this occasion, it was not possible to do quantitative correlation analyses of demographic data against responses e.g. whether boys were more likely to cite socio-economic issues than girls; or whether younger people were more likely to feel that closer family relationships protected them from gangs. This was because the demographic information was separated from the question responses to preserve each participant's anonymity.

The Off Centre research questionnaire consisted of 13 questions, most of which called for free text responses. Two of the 13 questions were based on a scale: question three offered a five point scale; question five offered a four point scale. Respondents were asked to endorse only one point per scale. The two scale questions were analysed quantitatively. Bar graphs of data reflect the percentage of respondents that endorsed each offered point of the two relevant scales.

The remaining 11 questions were analysed using a text analysis framework. Each response was unitised, keeping as close to the language and content of the response as possible. These units were then collapsed into each other, where they were similar, or part of a discrete subset. For instance, in question two, where participants were asked what their dreams for the future were, the response category 'I want to be a professional person', consisted of a number of specific responses. These specific responses included nurse, doctor, physiotherapist, engineer, pilot and teacher etc. Initially, all these were recorded as individual units. Latterly, these units were collapsed into an overarching 'professional person' category. This was done in line with basic text analysis principles to enable the qualitative data to be analysed quantitatively. It also enabled the data to be put into meaningful context.

Data relevant to all 11 questions were analysed in this way, and then presented in pie charts. Each question is represented by its own pie chart. Each chart represents the percentage (not count) responses to each question. Inter-rater reliability was ensured, by checking one rater's framework against a second independent rater.

Are young people pulled toward gang activity?

The information gained from young people's feedback (in the format seen in Appendix A) has been re-ordered for the reader's ease of access. We initially asked young people how many of their peers they felt were pulled toward joining gangs (Fig 7). Responses demonstrated that 52.5% of young people felt that 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' of young people were pulled towards joining gangs.

The 'not very many' category doesn't give us specific quantifiable information but it does clearly indicate that young people are pulled into gangs within this category. If we collapse this category, and recalculate, 75% of young people would consider that young people were pulled toward joining gangs. However, we felt that the 'quite a lot' category was equally unquantifiable so we have allowed it to remain. Overall, it is a fair conclusion to draw that the majority of young people feel that this is an issue which affects their peers in the areas where they live. This data supports previously received anecdotal evidence.

The issue raised in Kerim's story, of young people not seeing gangs as gangs because they are simply friends and other young people they grew up with comes across as another important factor to consider when looking at interventions. It may be useful to focus on identification of risky relationships with young people, and the process of recruiting younger people into gang activity by older members.

> "I don't class friend that I grew up with as a gang member."

The information gained from young people's feedback (in the format seen in Appendix A) has been re-ordered for the reader's ease of access. We initially asked young people how many of their peers they felt were pulled toward joining gangs (Fig 7). Responses demonstrated that 52.5% of young people felt that 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' of young people were pulled towards joining gangs.

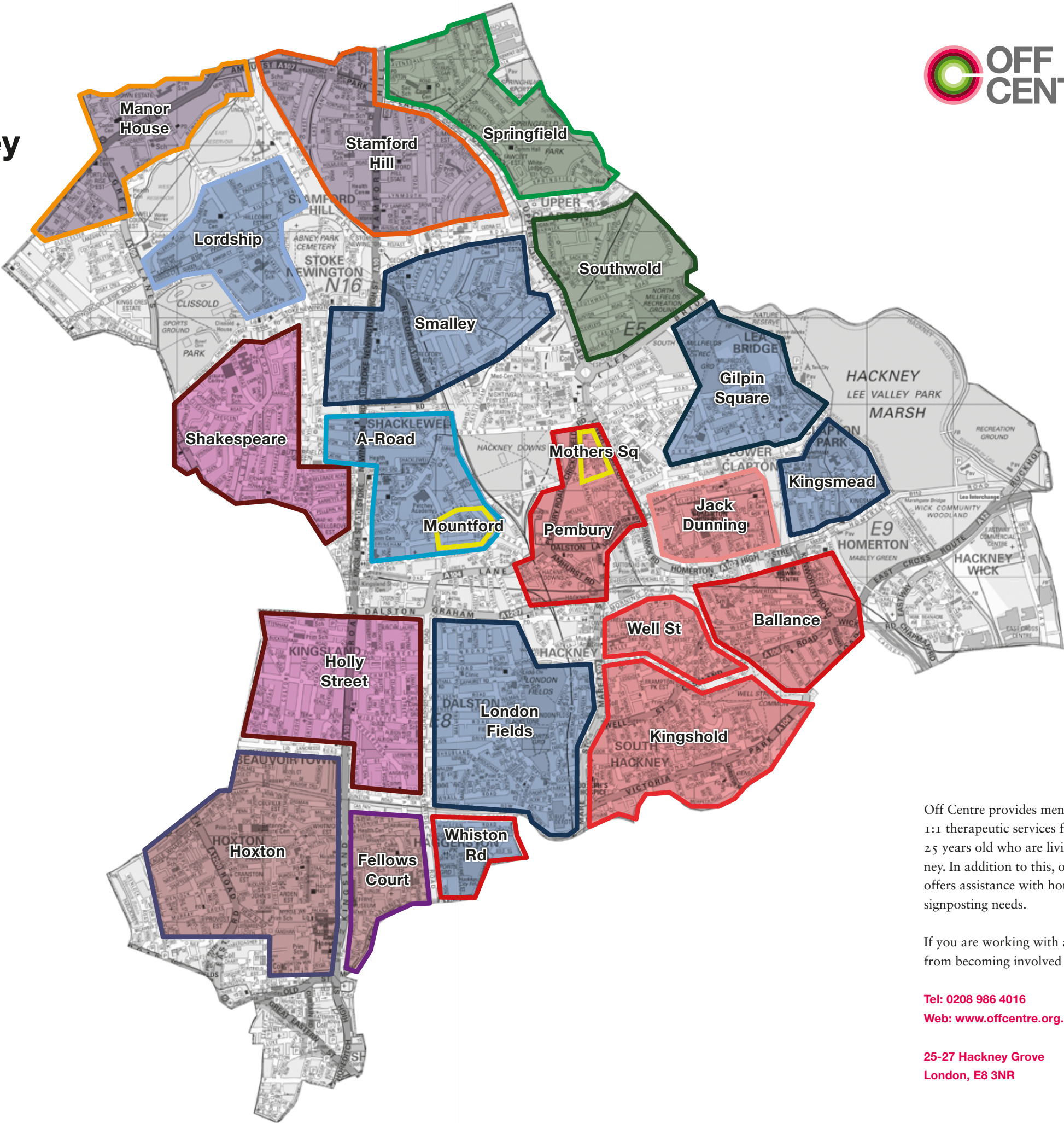**Fig. 7** How many young people are pulled toward joining gangs?
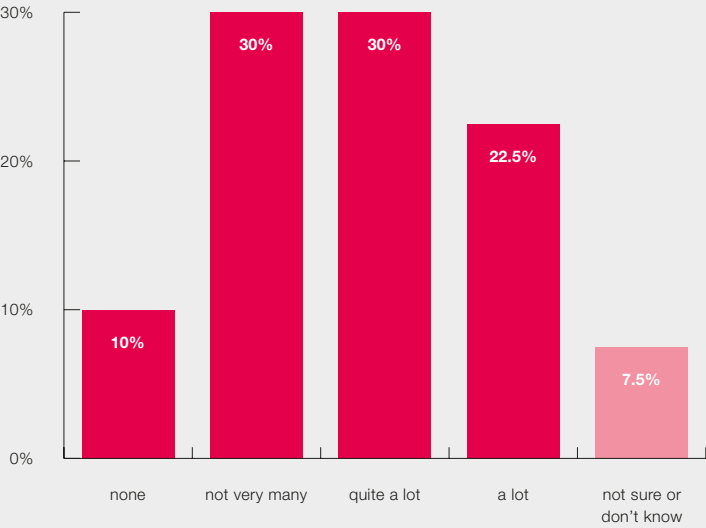
Operational map outlining gang boundaries in Hackney

OFF CENTRE

Gang Territories
- Manor House
- Stamford Hill
- Springfield
- Southwold
- Gilpin Square
- Kingsmead, London Fields, Smalley
- A Road
- Lordship
- Fellows Court
- Hoxton
- Holly Street, Shakespeare
- Pembury, Balance, Well Street, Kingshold, Whiston Road
- Jack Dunning
- Mothers Square, Mountford

Gang Alliances
- All closely linked to each other
- Linked but not on such a large scale as red
- Linked but not on such a large scale as red
- Holly Street is closely linked to Shakespeare but Fellows Court and parts of Hoxton are in dispute with/dislike Shakespeare.
- All directly or indirectly linked to each other. They do not associate with any of the 'non blue' gangs in the borough.
- Linked just to each other.

Steven Gowen, Crime researcher, Hackney Council gangs partnership

Manor House
Stamford Hill
Springfield
Lordship
Southwold
Smalley
Gilpin Square
Shakespeare
A-Road
Mothers Sq
Kingsmead
Mountford
Pembury
Jack Dunning
Holly Street
Well St
Ballance
London Fields
Kingshold
Hoxton
Fellows Court
Whiston Rd

Off Centre provides mentoring, psychosocial support and 1:1 therapeutic services for young people between 11 and 25 years old who are living, working or studying in Hackney. In addition to this, our advice and information service offers assistance with housing support, financial advice and signposting needs.

If you are working with a young person who may benefit from becoming involved with Off Centre please contact us:

Tel: 0208 986 4016
Web: www.offcentre.org.uk

25-27 Hackney Grove
London, E8 3NR

What difficulties does gang violence cause?

We asked young people what difficulties they thought gang violence caused, specifically (Fig 8). The most significant difficulty they thought it caused was 'increased fear and less safety'. In qualitative interviews and group discussions, fear related to gang violence clearly had an impact on young people's lives. This can be seen in some of the responses below:

> Young people talk of being fearful in their own neighbourhoods. This may lead to them feeling the need for protection

What difficulties do you think gang related violence/crime/or behaviour causes?
Scared in your own Neighbourhood

What benefits do you think there might be to being a part of a gang?
Protection, money and drugs

Area restriction

> Young people discussed how gangs restrict their ability to go where they want in their borough

Some young people discussed how territorial issues lead to them feeling unable to travel to certain parts of the borough and remaining much more restricted to specific areas. This is perhaps unsurprising given that Hackney has the highest number of gangs within any London borough [30] and how close these areas are to one another (see Fig 3 and 4). Young people explained that this means they often miss out on opportunities, either because they don't hear about events, or because they don't feel safe travelling there.

Some parents were not letting their children out to be involved in activities they used to be involved in (see below) and many young people were becoming more socially isolated due to their own fear of being unprotected.

> Young people tell us that gang-related violence causes fear in their parents in allowing them out

What difficulties do you think gang-related violence/crime/or behaviour causes?
Fright of parents allowing their kids out.

The next largest response (18.85%) was in relation to 'more crime, weapons and stabbings'. The media coverage of homicides, stabbings and shootings in Hackney, along with images (such as the examples below) [31] have also fed the level of fear experienced by young people in the community, as can be seen by responses such as the one below:

Fig. 8   **What difficulties does gang violence cause**

- More fear and less safety
- More crime e.g stabbings, weapons
- More deaths
- Restricted to specific areas
- Pain / Sorrow
- More problems with family
- Low self esteem
- Poor school attendance
- Tense atmosphere in community
- More drug dealers
- Coerced to join gangs by peer pressure
- Authorities see all YP as gang members because of what a few YP do
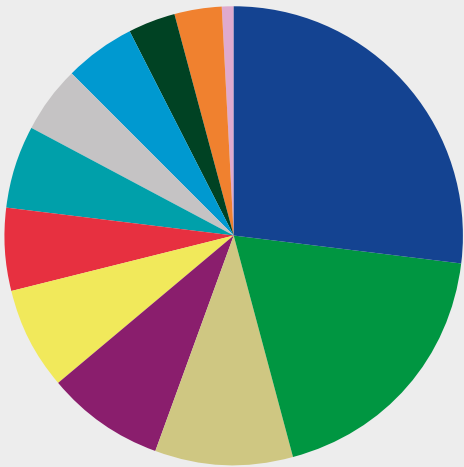
> Young people explained that in a cyclical way, some of them wanted to join gangs to protect them from what they heard in the media (stabbings and shootings).

What benefits do you think there might be to being a part of a gang?
protection from that media hype of stabbing and shooting

The third most significant difficulty young people thought that gang violence causes was 'more deaths' (9.84%). Undertaking outreach, our staff heard of many young people who knew someone who had been stabbed, violently attacked or killed. To some it had become normalised as part of their lives to the point where they discussed the deaths of friends or stabbings of peers as 'the way of the world' in a numb and disconnected way. Considering that in the last five years, Hackney has maintained its position as one of the eight London boroughs with the highest number of gang-related homicides, perhaps this should be less surprising than it was when hearing it directly from young people themselves.

> Young people tell us that gang-related involvement leads to prison and death

What difficulties do you think gang related violence/crime/or behaviour causes?
To prison and death

> Young people tell us that gang involvement causes death

They cause death.

> Young people tell us that gang related activity causes death, pain and sorrow

Death Pain Sorrow   *Death*

>> Once again, young people single out 'death' as a consequence of gang-related activity

In order, thereafter, of issues gangs caused, young people said that it restricted the areas they were able to go to (8.2%), caused pain and sorrow (7.38%), caused family problems (5.74%), resulted in low self esteem (5.74%), led to poor school attendance (4.82%), created a tense atmosphere within the community (4.92%), led to more drug dealing (3.28%), created situations involving peer pressure (0.28%) and a couple of young people felt that it led to authorities seeing all young people as potential gang members. The quote below, taken from one of the verbal interviews further illustrates how isolated and judged this can make young people feel:

> "(It) means people don't come to this area. Like you're here, but most people wouldn't just come. So, you know, we're left here. Then we resent that, you know. 'Cos we're not all like that. And then the police… look (points to undercover police car) are here waiting to catch us. Where's the help though?"

What benefits are related to gang involvement?

Despite the clear difficulties that gang activity causes, we knew that some young people must experience benefits in order for them to be pulled in. We explored this with them (Fig. 9) and the main benefits they saw to joining gangs were (in order) protection (24.41%), to gain a sense of family and belonging (20.47%), for financial autonomy (19.69%) and to gain status (18.11%).

There were minor additional benefits such as access to drugs (3.15%), access to sex/girls (2.36%), access to weapons and having a structure of directed activity (both 2.36%). Some young people (7.09%) said that gang involvement served no benefit at all (as can be seen from the feedback below).

It is interesting that young people in the previous question reported that gang violence causes fear and a lack of safety, and then proceed to say that gang involvement serves to ensure protection. This clearly creates a rather circular and perpetual process.

> Young person tells us we must be crazy when asking of the benefits to joining a gang

You must be crazy

These young people's responses might add weight to a structural theoretical explanation of gang involvement. This would suggest that young people may be responding to structural disadvantage, minority status and exclusion from opportunities offered to the 'mainstream'. The creation of a subculture is in line with Cohen's 'strain theory', offering an alternative route to success and financial autonomy that young people may not feel to be possible through mainstream pathways. Although 'power and status' are the intrinsic needs stated in this model, [32] most young people in Hackney appear primarily, to want to 'belong' and recreate a sense of family structure as a core motivator. Perhaps as a response to emotional neglect and a lack of familial love/compassion, young people appear to be seeking out an alternative sense of family from gang involvement.

Fig. 9   **Benefits of gang involvement**

- Protection
- Sense of family/belonging
- Money
- Power/status
- None
- Access to drugs
- Access to sex and/or girls
- Access to weapons
- Directed, meaningful activity
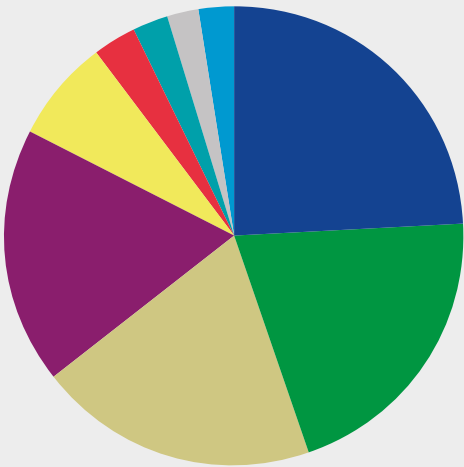
The above findings correlate with recent research findings, which show that young people with higher levels of 'parental warmth' showed lower levels of initial involvement in gang activities. [33] Feedback in the verbal interviews further illustrated the point with quotes such as: *"You join gangs to feel like you matter to someone. Like, if you died you'd be missed then."* Similarly, this can be seen in the written feedback:

> A young person explains the absence of father figures and need for male role models

What three main things do you feel could lead to young people in your area feeling unhappy or hopeless when they think about the future?
1. No father figure.
2. No role models
3. Stereotypes

> Young people explain some of the reasons why their peers might join a gang-drugs, money and feeling part of a family

What benefits do you think there might be to being a part of a gang?
Drugs, money, being part of a family

> The young person who was filling this in, initially responded by telling us the benefits were 'love' which he quickly scribbled out when a peer mocked him over his shoulder

love

Financial autonomy was also a motivating factor, perhaps arising from unstable socioeconomic conditions. In order to gain more understanding of some of the environmental stressors that might be affecting the young people in Hackney, we asked them more about the holistic aspects of their lives, starting with job prospects.

How likely do young people think it is that they'll get a job they like in the future?

We began by asking them how likely they thought it would be to find a job that they liked in the future (Fig. 10). 65% of young people thought it would either be quite likely, or very likely. Although at first glance, this is really positive, the opportunities available for young people have dramatically reduced due to the current economic climate. Nationally, unemployment rose by 7,000 to 2.52 million in the three months leading up to January 2013. [34] Specifically, the number of 16–24 year olds looking for work peaked at over one million. In the three months from November 2012 to January 2013, there were 993,000 looking for work - an unemployment rate of 21.2%. [35]

The belief that they will be successful finding paid work in a career that they like is a double-edged sword for young people. Although it demonstrates optimism and belief in a positive future, it might also indicate a lack of political engagement and therefore a misinterpretation when this road to employability is tougher than they estimate. Without clarity of the current employability market, failure may be internalised as opposed to being externalised and seen as the result of a difficult socio-political climate.

Our 2012 report, Hackney Dreaming underlines this concern by demonstrating that young people felt success in this area to be largely down to the individual. Although this may have increased a sense of autonomy in the short term, few of them had a longer-term strategy or plan for getting from the point that they were at currently to where they'd like to be in the future.

In addition to the evident lack of structured long-term planning in regard to employment, only 25% of young people surveyed in our Hackney Dreaming report felt optimistic about the next year in general. With our current knowledge about the manifestation of mental health disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress (PTSD), where the disorder itself results in a sense of hopelessness and foreshortened future, this finding lends itself to further inquiry. It is difficult to ascertain whether environmental stress on young people has resulted in hopelessness and a sense of foreshortened future, which thereafter impacts on their motivation in regard to employment and education, or whether the emphasis on themselves as the primary facilitator of success, with reduced experience and skill to implement a long-term and effective plan, leads to disappointment and internalisation of stress. Maybe it is an interplay of both, plus additional factors. Either way, it would be interesting to look further at the link between general emotional well-being, reduction in optimism about the future, and lack of long-term planning toward employability.

In addition to employment opportunities, we wanted to know what aspirations young people had (Fig. 11). We asked them what dreams they had for the future. 35% of young people wanted to become sports players. Many interviewees followed this response by naming coaches or sports personalities who had inspired them, or referred to football programmes they were involved in. The Kickz programme has been successful in engaging young people in target 'risk' areas of Hackney, and helping them to overcome postcode issues, have male role-models and avoid anti-social behaviour through engaging in healthy activities.

There may, therefore, be some response bias to this question based on the success of such programmes and attachment to individuals delivering them. While the programmes are intrinsically helping young people in the short term, and even

providing a vehicle to finding longer term employment through 'employability courses' and interview support, it may be a risk point for some young people's emotional wellbeing if they realise that (due to a lack of social support, talent or training opportunities) sports careers are not a route for them towards paid employment. The incongruity of their high expectations to be 'a famous footballer' and the likelihood of realising that ambition might create a void that young people could fall in to, without a safety net of career guidance and alternative opportunities offered to them.

25% of young people interviewed wanted to become 'professionals'. This category included roles such as doctors, lawyers and teachers. Again, on one side, this is positive; as long as it is paired with careers advice and the necessary educational support needed to follow such a route successfully.

> This young person dreams of being an entrepreneur

> This young person dreams of being a footballer, lawyer or doctor

> This young person dreams of being a footballer. They'd like to be a doctor as a second option. They feel it is very likely to materialize

The 16.25% of young people naming that they have 'no dreams or aspirations' should be of wider public concern. The point of 'giving up hope' is a major risk factor for a range of mental health difficulties; namely depression. It also indicates a sense of having 'let go' of internal control and autonomy. This may be a risk point for peers to intervene and offer alternative, more risky paths toward success that appear at first sight to be easier and quicker ways of gaining financial

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Fig. 10   How likely young people felt it was that they would find a job they liked in the future

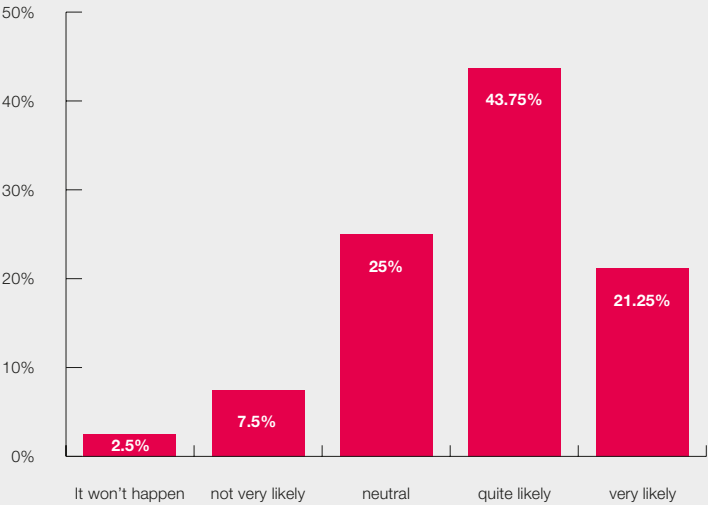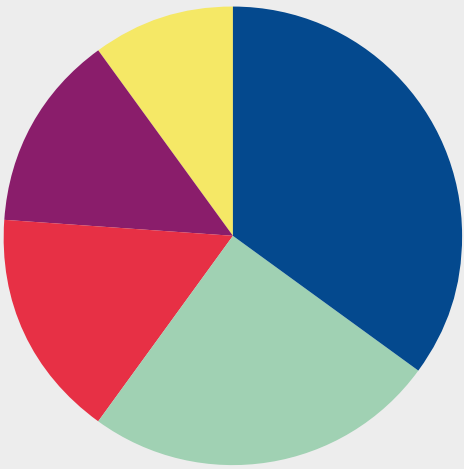| Category	Percentage
It won't happen	2.5%
not very likely	7.5%
neutral	25%
quite likely	43.75%
very likely	21.25%

Fig. 11   What dreams young people have for the future

- I want to be a sports player
- I want to be a professional person
- I don't have any dreams
- I want to achieve academically
- I just want to make money

autonomy and success (with the added bonus of 'belonging' and 'protection' that gangs appear to offer). This might also facilitate a process of giving up one's sense of self in favour of a group identity. Giving up one's 'self' and development of 'group mind' is well evidenced to be a major risk factor in the process of de-individuation (losing self-awareness as a group), reduction of empathy toward others, and increased criminal/violent behaviours. [37]

Thereafter, in order, young people wanted to achieve academically (13.75%) and others just wanted to make money (10%) in an unspecified way.

Qualitative quotes from verbal interviews, such as the ones seen below illustrate the hopelessness that some young people in the area feel for the future:

"

"My dreams (laughs) my dreams! My dreams are long gone."

"To survive. To be alive still when I'm older. That's my dream!"

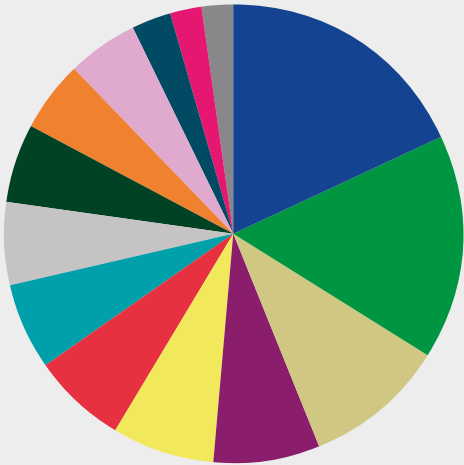"Get as far away from this place as possible. Be free. One day."

"I've stopped dreaming. Now I live in the real world."

"

What leads to young people feeling unhappy or hopeless about the future?

Moving away from questions in regard to employment, we wanted to discover generally what led young people to feel unhappy or hopeless about the future (Fig. 12). There was a wide range of responses. The most common feedback was that there were 'not enough youth activities' (18.13%). In exploring this further, young people said that they knew there were a lot of opportunities out there, but they were often unable to access them due to the fear they felt about going out alone, postcode issues or lack of awareness of opportunities. Many of them highly valued the local youth service but wanted it to be open more frequently, or to have more staff/activities there.

15.93% of young people revisited the lack of employment opportunities and said it made them feel 'hopeless about the future', and 9.89% said that poor parenting or lack of parental figures at home made them feel 'unhappy and hopeless'. In order thereafter, young people cited; too many gangs (7.69%), no money (7.14%), bullying (6.59%), lack of choices and poor performance at school (both 6.04%), poor schools and bad teachers (5.49%), low expectations of others (4.95%), poor housing and violence/crime/substance abuse (all 2.75%) and finally feeling alienated and lonely (2.2%) as holistic factors leading to unhappiness and feelings of hopelessness.

> Young people discuss issues that lead them to feeling unhappy and hopeless about the future

What three main things do you feel could lead to young people in your area feeling unhappy or hopeless when they think about the future?
1. Poverty
2. Bullying
3. Unsupportive teachers.

Although a large number of young people cite gang violence as being a major issue for them, from this feedback we can see that gang violence does not feature as the most prominent indicator of unhappiness or hopelessness. Socio-economic issues such as poverty, lack of alternative activities, lack of employment opportunities and lack of educational achievement feature much more strongly. This indicates these areas as potential risk factors leading to gang involvement, with gang involvement being merely one of the potential outcomes of living with these socioeconomic stressors or perhaps even something that feels like a positive choice when faced with no other apparent route to success. Once again, this suggests the argument for Cohen's 'strain theory' to explain the pull towards the creation of a sub culture. Lack of parental figures can be seen to correlate with the need for a 'sense of belonging' gained from gang membership. In this way, risk factors and gains can easily be identified in parallel with one another. Although confounding factors could make causation research extremely difficult, further in-depth correlation studies between specific areas of socioeconomic deprivation and gains from gang involvement might be interesting. This could potentially offer further insights, leading to effective intervention points.

Fig. 12 **Environmental stressors leading to a sense of unhappiness and hopelessness**

- Not enough activities/facilities for youths
- No jobs
- Poor parenting or lack of parental figures
- Too many gangs
- No money
- Bullying
- No choices leading to low self-confidence
- Poor performance at school
- Poor schools and bad teachers
- Police harassment
- Low & poor expectations from others
- Poor housing in bad areas
- Violence, crime & substance abuse
- Feeling alienated and lonely

What people, places, service and / or activities did young people feel would help their peers to exit or steer clear of gang activity?

In an attempt to identify potential intervention opportunities at this stage, we asked young people what people, places, services and/or activities they thought could help young people exit or steer clear of gang activity (see Fig. 9). Again, 38.28% of young people wanted 'increased youth activities and facilities.' Football also features highly (12.5%). These both involve young people in their own communities, are delivered by people they already feel comfortable with and provide a structured and supportive environment. Sports can also assist young people in expelling energy and regulating their emotional states. Rules involved in sport and organization can additionally help to develop neuronal activity in the neocortical areas discussed in the first section as being potentially under-developed in young people at risk of gang involvement.

Employment features prominently, with 11.72% of young people saying that paid employment would pull them away from gang involvement.
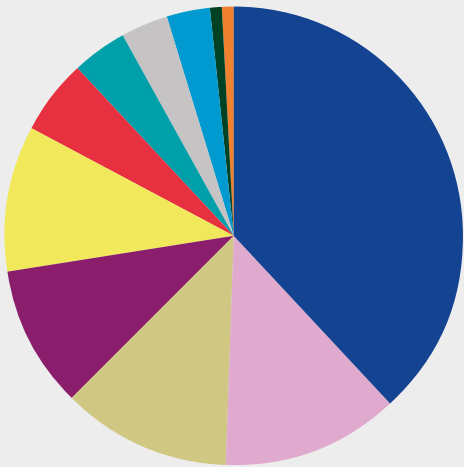
> Young people clearly outline the need for paid employment

If a service could do three things that would really help young people in your area what would they be?
1. jobs centre.
2. jobs for kids.
3. jobs overall. (for young adults, 11+)

This fits with the findings from Fig 13 relating to young people wanting financial autonomy. 10.16 % of young people felt that better careers and life skills advice would assist in steering them away from gang involvement. This, no doubt, feeds into previous employment needs. 5.47% of young people felt that better family relationships would assist their peers in exiting from gang activities. 3.9% of young people felt that an increase in police presence, in their areas, would reduce the number of young people involved in gangs. Other factors that young people felt would steer their peers away from gang activities were free university (3.13%), experience of a different life (3.11%) and early intervention (0.78%). A further .78% felt that once you were in a gang, there was no way out.

What would young people change about their area?

We asked young people about their areas and what they would change about them (Fig. 14). 42.31% of young people wanted more youth activities, which is in line with previous young people's voices. 23.08% of young people felt it would be really good to reduce crime and gang activity. It is interesting to note that although gang activity was not prominent in Fig. 8 (in regard to environmental stressors leading to a sense of unhappiness and hopelessness) it features there as the second most significant factor they would like to change about their area.

12.8% of young people surveyed wanted more football activities, 7.69% would like to see change in socio-economic factors. 6.41% wanted to see an increase in community cohesion and an equal amount of young people weren't sure what changes they'd make. 18% wanted less police activity. In regard to this last area of change, young people clarified in the 'why' section, that police presence sometimes reduced risk and made them feel safer. However, they also said it meant that some of their peers had been caught for doing things that many people their age might do, but that young people in their area get criminal records more frequently because the police presence in their area is high and that didn't feel fair to them. They explained that employability then becomes harder with a criminal record and some young people commented upon this vicious cycle feeling frustrating.

Fig. 13

What people, places, service and / or activities do you think could help young people exit or steer clear of gang activity?

- Youth activities and facilities
- Football
- More jobs and apprenticeships
- Careers and life skills advice
- Role models in local community
- Better family relationships
- More local police
- Free university
- Experiencing a different life
- Nothing – once you're in a gang it's for life
- Early help to young children for prevention

Fig. 14

If you could change one thing about your area, what would it be, and why?

- More youth activities
- Reduce crime and gangs
- More football activities
- Change socio-economic factors
- Nothing or not sure
- Increase community cohesion
- Less police activity
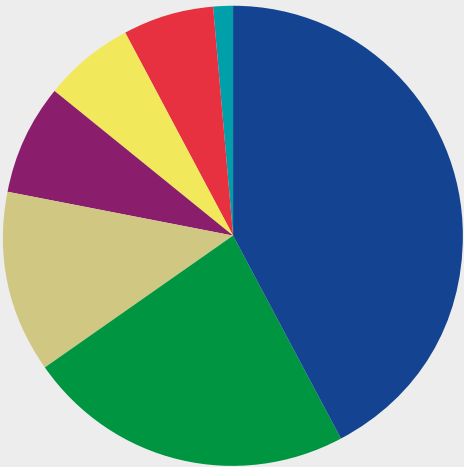
What did young people feel could be done, to better assist them in feeling happier or optimistic about their future?

In exploring what things in the community made young people feel happier or optimistic about their futures (see Fig. 15), the majority of interviewees wanted more activities and youth facilities (23.23%) and 14.65% wanted more football activities. 12.12% wanted career advice. We know from previous research that young people strongly appreciate advice and guidance that is tailored to their individual needs and circumstances and also require encouragement so that they have the confidence to pursue their goals.

Thereafter, in order of importance from most to least, young people cited: more friendships (8.08%), opportunities for work experience (6.06%), trips away from the area (5.56%) more job availability (5.56%), better education opportunities (5.56%), closer and better family relationships (4.04%) closer and happier communities (3.54%), more local role models (2.02%), didn't know (2.02%), fewer gangs (1.52%), more police and increased security (1.52%), reduction in poverty, knowing you are good at something, more anti-bullying policies and funding for university places (all at 1.01%). Again, increased activities, access to education and employment and tackling socioeconomic issues score higher than naming gang issues as a specific problem in its own right, which points (once again) to gang involvement as a potential consequence of not getting these needs met, as opposed to an issue in its own right.

What activities would young people like provided for them to reduce stress?

In breaking down 'activities' a little further, young people were asked what outdoor activities they would choose to do, if they were offered the choice. As can be seen (Fig. 16) football was the most popular choice. However, it may be worth considering that football is also the most widely available activity on offer in these areas. As discussed previously, this might have created some level of response bias based on a lack of exposure to alternative options and close attachment relationships to facilitators providing football activities. Thereafter, in order, basketball was the most popular selection, then visiting theme parks, rugby, horse-riding and tennis. Following these categories, to an extent all outdoor activities were rated similarly.

What key things did young people want services to do for them?

We asked young people what three things services could do, in order to really help young people in their communities (see Fig. 17). 30.22% of young people cited mentoring and careers advice as being the main service they wanted provided.

We are aware, from previous research and publications such as the Hackney Dreaming report, that young people strongly appreciate advice and guidance that is tailored to their individual needs and circumstances.[38] In particular, Hackney Dreaming demonstrated that of the young people they surveyed, 68% of young people looked to their parents for support. 52% valued advice from their schools or colleges and 55% sought and appreciated advice from voluntary and community sector organisations. A secondary issue which arose from the Hackney Dreaming report was the gap that some young people felt between their parents cultural background and the advice they were able to give based on education/employment systems and opportunities in England. The voluntary and community sector is clearly able to play a significant role in providing this type of support for young people, perhaps even more so than schools, which may be due to high demands placed on the education system currently, or the types of relationships that young people have with school in general.

Fig. 15 What are the three main things in your area that you think can make young people feel happier or optimistic about their future?

- More activities and facilities
- More football activities
- Career and life skills advice
- More friendships
- Opportunities for work experience
- Trips away for young people
- More job availability
- Better educational opportunities
- Closer and better family relationships
- Close, happy community
- More local positive role models
- Don't know
- Fewer gangs
- More police, more security in the area
- Funding for university
- More anti-bullying programmes
- Reducing poverty
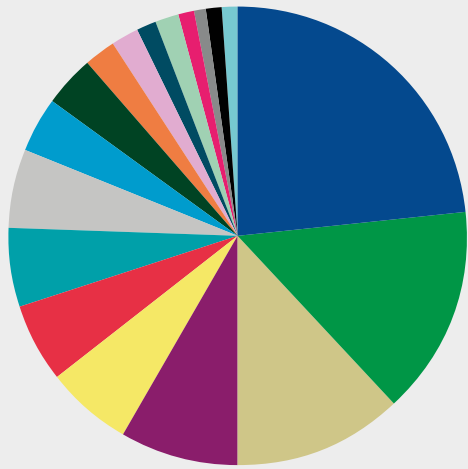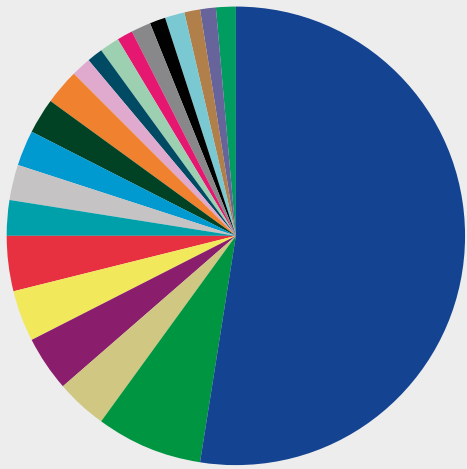- Knowing that you're good at something

Fig. 16 What outdoor activities would you choose to do if you were given the choice?

- Football
- Basketball
- Theme Parks
- Tennis
- Horseriding
- Rugby
- Paintball
- Mountain Climbing
- Athletics
- Cycling
- Table Tennis
- Archery
- Rowing
- Canoeing
- Skateboarding
- Skiing
- Walking
- Golf
- Cricket
- Netball / Volleyball
- Hockey

Mentors can also play a crucial role in this area. By really getting to know the young people individually, they can assist them in thinking through tailored routes towards employment, education or apprenticeships. They can also steer them through that journey; motivating them if they encounter hurdles and celebrating successes with them. If they are mentors recruited from a similar area with shared experiences, they also become people who their mentees regard with great respect. They can act as an anchor point, ensuring that their mentees don't become susceptible to engaging in behaviour that would lead to them getting involved in illegal activities and getting criminal records (which would then create a further barrier to accessing employability courses and consequently paid employment).

Thereafter, in keeping with previous responses, 15.38% of young people wanted organisations to offer job opportunities and/ or apprenticeships. 6.5% wanted trips for young people, citing also the importance of getting out of the borough. 5.49% wanted organisations to help young people to exit from gangs and an equal amount requested that organisations offer counselling to young people. 4.95% wanted assistance in creating a better social life, 3.3% wanted organisations to help in creating a sense of hope for the future. 2.2% said they needed support with financial planning and 1.1% wanted organisations to do something to make young people safer.

How would young people suggest Off Centre advertise its services?

Through the outreach work we undertook, we recognised that Off Centre offers some of the above already, but that young people hadn't been aware of where our organisation was and what we offered. With this in mind, we asked them what Off Centre could do to make sure that more young people knew about us (see Fig. 18).

The most popular response (22.35%) was to go into schools and do talks to let young people know who we were, what we did, what we had to offer and how they could get involved. 20% wanted us to advertise on TV, 18.82% said the best way to let young people know what we did was through social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. 16.47% of young people said we should use posters to advertise in their areas. 7.06% told us to use leaflets. 5.88% interestingly wanted letters through their post box. When asked why, young people explained that due to fear of postcode disputes and going outside of their areas, they rarely went out, so wouldn't see what was on offer unless it came through the postbox. Some young people were genuinely surprised that organisations such as ours existed and cared about them. 3.5% of young people said we should organise sports activities and/or set up youth activity days for young people to attend, and signpost to appropriate support services. The remaining two categories consisting of 1.18% said they didn't know who Off Centre was, but suggested we recruit 'young ambassadors' for Off Centre, to raise our profile amongst other young people, and campaign on issues they had raised.

Fig. 17   **If a service could do three things that would really help young people in your area what would they be?**

- Facilities and activities for young people
- Mentoring and career service
- Job opportunities and apprenticeships
- Trips for young people
- Keep young people out of gangs
- Meeting new people / better social life
- Make young people feel safer
- Create hope for the future
- Anti-bullying programmes
- Financial planning help
- Counselling
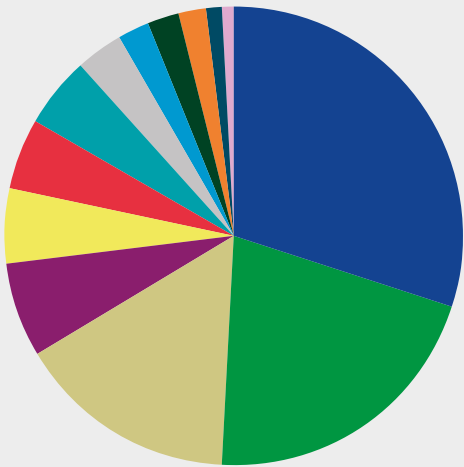- Reduce poverty
- Less police harassment

Fig. 18   **What can Off Centre do to make sure that more young people know that we are here?**

- Go into schools
- Adverts eg. On TV, billboards
- Social network sites eg. Twitter
- Lots of posters in the area
- Leaflets
- Letters to everyone in the area
- Arrange sport activities eg. Football tournaments
- Set up fun 'youth days' for YP to attend
- Did not know who Off Centre were
- Recruiting young 'ambassadors' for Off Centre
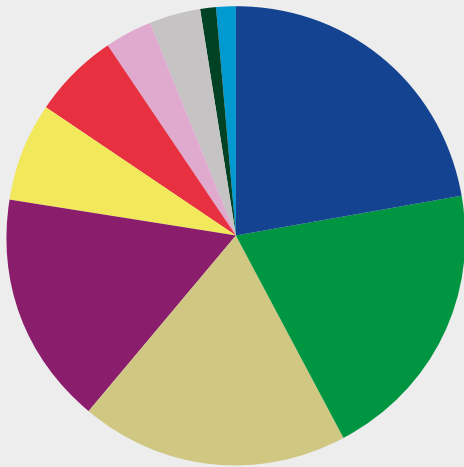
We wanted to invite the interviewees to tell us one thing, that they felt was important for us to hear, before ending (see Fig. 19). 21.82% of young people told us to provide more youth centres services, 16.36% had nothing to say. 12.73% said we should keep kids off the streets. This was followed up by conversations about them feeling that when kids were bored they got into trouble, so they wanted services to provide more activities to keep them from being bored on the streets. 10.91% told us to keep doing our best, 7.27% wanted us to know that they were 'bored, not bad'. 5.45% said they needed more careers advice and assistance in how to achieve their dreams. An equal amount wanted more football sessions. 3.64% of young people wanted to tell us to provide more positive role models, in order to stop young people joining gangs, and 1.82% jointly thought that there should be more opportunities for young black youths, in particular, and that there should be more mentors to assist with school work.

Fig. 18   **If you could say one thing to us, that you feel it's important for us to hear or know what would it be?**

- More services for young people
- Nothing
- Keep kids off the street
- Keep doing your best
- We are not bad, we are bored
- More things that are free and fun
- We need more career advice
- More football sessions! More sports
- How do we achieve our dreams?
- Positive role models stops young people joining gangs
- More opportunities for young black youths
- More mentors to help with school work
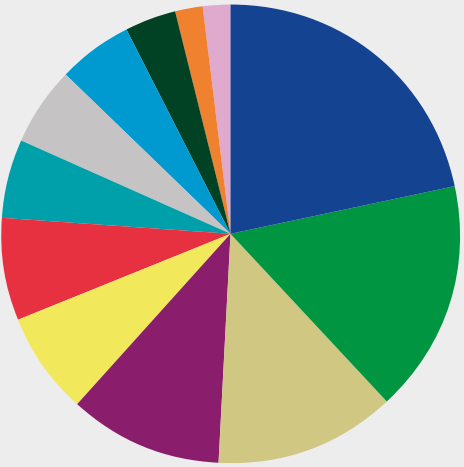
A summary of potential risk and resilience factors

For the purpose of better comprehending how to offer effective support for young people in our community, we wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the risk and resilience factors they identified as being significant, and the impact that gang violence has on their lives. Research undertaken in recent years has already demonstrated that living in socially disorganised areas,[39] having low socioeconomic status or living in poverty,[40] coming from single-parent households,[41] having poor familial involvement and / or behaviour strategies,[42] living with parental conflict,[43] failure within the education system and poor relationships with teachers[44] all provided fertile ground for subsequent gang involvement. We were also aware that peer influence,[45] having low self-esteem,[46] and personality traits including aggression, neuroticism, extroversion, repression, denial and 'toughness'[47] all further contributed to the risk of individuals becoming involved in gang-related activities.

In addition to the diagram of needs (Fig. 1), in regard to resilience, evidence shows that love and compassion demonstrated by caregivers develops neuronal capacity, empathy and certainly emotional regulation. The impact of emotional neglect, abuse and trauma can be seen in neurological deficits; but in particular (and for the purposes of this report), it can affect the part of the brain responsible for empathy (the supra-orbital area of the neo-cortex).[48] This area (which can be seen in Fig 5) ordinarily enables us to place ourselves in another person's position so that we can understand how they might be feeling and respond accordingly. Consequences resulting from environmentally caused neurological damage can include lack of ability to empathise,[49] aggressive and anti-social behaviour, inability to emotionally self-regulate in high stress situations, and emotional dissociation/ numbness.

On a neurological level, the limbic system (see Fig 6) can also be affected by environmental and/ or interpersonal trauma. This can result in young people failing to appropriately modulate 'negative and positive emotions, so that more aggressive impulsive behaviours come to the forefront and are likely to be expressed.'[52] It can also result in over-reactive fight and flight responses from young people who can feel increasingly threatened by environmental cues and triggers. For many young people exposed to traumatic events, they remain in a hyper-aroused state and some go on to develop 'Post Traumatic Stress Disorder'. For those with 'acute stress' reactions or 'post traumatic stress disorder', they may well be in a constant agitated state, feel hypersensitive, paranoid, and constantly on the look-out for potential threats. At first, the threats might be based on the original trauma they were exposed to (such as a young male person carrying a knife for example), but over a short time, this becomes generalized (so that they might now feel threatened by all young male people between 14 and 20). If the threat is triggered, there is a strong risk that they will likely respond in an overly defensive way, based on their symptoms.

Hormones un-doubtably play a part too. Serotonin has been found to be significantly lower in violent young men,[53] and we are aware that serotonin levels can be lowered by environmental stressors and losses, which many of these young people have indeed been exposed to.[54] Testosterone levels are found to be higher in young men who are exposed to violence which, in turn, has been found to increase dominance.[55] Testosterone is reactive to environmental stressors and behaviours which exacerbate the sense of dominance; such as holding a gun, for example.[56] With a lack of early identification of such presentations,
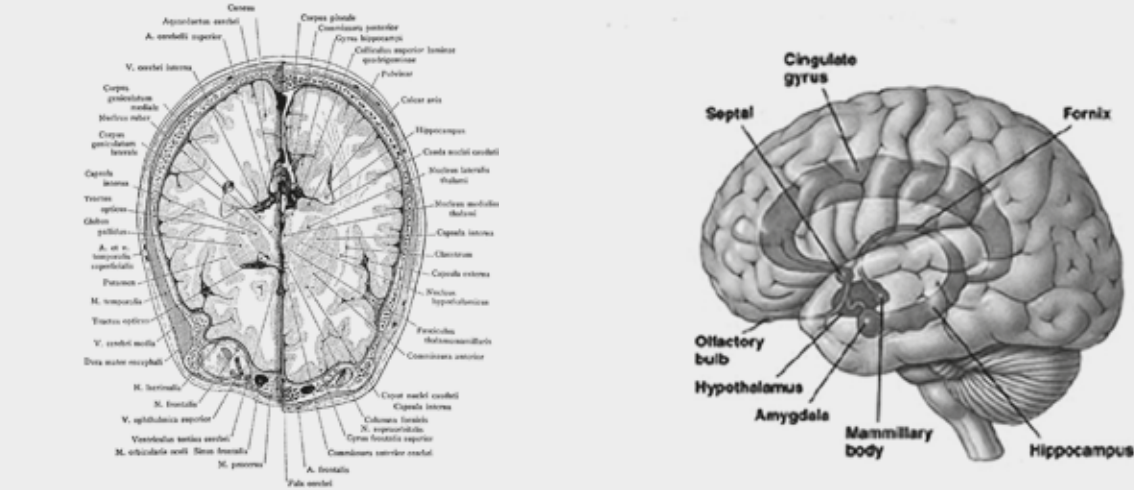
and referral to specialist psychiatric services, many young people 'self-medicate' in an attempt to regulate the intense chemical surges they experience, and resulting exhaustion it causes thereafter. This often creates secondary difficulties around drug dependency. The cross over between neocortical transmission and hormonal regulation on behaviour is an exciting and rapidly advancing area of psychology in which we are only just starting to explore.

What is already clear to see, however, is the potential overlap between socio-economic deprivation and/ or traumatic reactions, environmentally induced emotional and neurological difficulties and the potential for involvement in criminal behaviour.[57] The young people we see have frequently not had the nurturing environment and care they needed growing up, and have repeatedly been exposed to traumatic material. Many of them have reached the point where they describe themselves as 'emotionally numb' and able to carry out acts of aggression without emotional repercussions. One can see how this presentation poses a risk for involvement in gang activity and violence. What we know from extensive research in the area of risk and resilience is that effective interventions can prevent the potentially life-lasting damage of exposure to trauma or abuse in childhood and that it is only through listening and responding to young people that services can target their work to address risks that concern them and find solutions which work for them.[58]

Trauma, therapy and young people's journey at Off Centre

C. G. Jung states that the outer trauma ends and its effects maybe largely "forgotten", but that the psychological sequelae of the trauma continues to haunt the inner world. [59]

At Off Centre, we work with young people who are haunted by the after effects of the trauma they have experienced. Physical violence, bullying and sexual abuse are examples of just some of the forms of trauma that can violate the young person's psyche. One of the spaces that these traumatic experiences can happen within is the 'gang'.

Young people's need to belong, loneliness, isolation, not having their emotional needs met within their families, or the very painful experience of having endured emotional, physical or sexual abuse within the family system brings them close to the gangs. Most of these issues also relate to early years attachment models and it may be of interest to note that 'place attachment' and territoriality appear to be mutually exclusive. [60] Perhaps to some extent, following interpersonal trauma and abuse, 'place' attachment is safer than attachment in human relationships.

Poor early years attachment is a significant risk factor for the development of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Complex PTSD symptoms also involve suicidal preoccupation, excessive risk taking, somatisation, feelings of guilt and shame, re-victimisation, victimising others, despair and hopelessness. When young people arrive at Off Centre they are often experiencing the above named symptoms, to different intensities (depending on their internal resilience and social support).

We offer them counselling, art or dramatherapy, and psycho-social activities as a way to process the traumatic incidents, heal and move forward. Therapy creates a contained safe space for young people to be able to express themselves, their painful feelings, memories and be heard. The trusting relationship they build with the therapist is an opportunity to heal the wounds from past relationships.

Off Centre offers young people a non-judgmental place of belonging and many of the young people who use our service feel that Off Centre is a welcoming, accepting 'home' where they are cared for. This sense diminishes the young person's need to belong elsewhere; potentially to a gang where their physical and emotional wellbeing might be at risk.

Ideally, through the healing process that takes place within therapy, young people's need to be in potentially self harming relationships decreases. They develop a sense of self, and build self confidence through therapy which allows them to set boundaries. They are able to say 'no' to potentially risky relationships or situations and do not feel the need to necessarily conform to what is asked from them. Through therapy, young people are more likely to recognize and establish healthy, positive relationships.

Therapy also helps the young people move out of depression, despair, and 'sense of foreshortened future'. By expressing and exploring the numb, painful feelings related to trauma, young people are able to realise what might have been keeping them trapped and in despair. This brings a sense of freedom and alive-ness, where they can start to have dreams and aspirations about the future and gain enough confidence to build a life of their own.

Off Centre is a safe, caring 'family' for young people where they feel like they belong, are accepted and heard.

Summary

Help us, dont give up

↑   Young people request that we continue to stay focused on meeting their needs

Gang involvement is an issue which young people seem to want services to assist in addressing. Gang activity can cause increased fear, a lack of safety, criminal activity, and in some tragic circumstances, deaths. This, understandably, has secondary consequences such as parents not wanting to let their children and young people out, and young people themselves feeling scared to go out unprotected (or cross areas identified as postcode territories linked to specific gangs). Ironically then, the main reason that young people join gangs, according to young people themselves, is for protection.

The next most significant reason that young people join gangs is to gain a sense of family. We know from research that familial risk factors such as having poor family involvement, being abused or neglected and living with parental conflict can lead to gang involvement, so it is not difficult to imagine the attraction to the 'sense of belonging' and 'family' that gang may appear to offer.

The incentive of money was the third most likely reason that young people felt their peers were attracted to gang involvement. This may be directly related to young people wanting access to material goods or simply that they wish to have more financial autonomy in order to survive and/or enjoy life. It is likely also to be linked to status and a perception that material goods communicate 'success'; especially for young people raised in areas affected by poverty or having experienced neglect. Visiting the wards from which young people become involved in gang activity, and observing the demographic profile, it is understandable that financial autonomy is seen as attractive.

Young people repeatedly reported that they would like increased opportunities to access free education and paid employment. If this was secured, it may well be the case that many of them would not be so attracted to the financial incentives they see gang membership as providing. They were calling out for improved support at school, mentors to help them to succeed, free university places, apprenticeship opportunities and paid employment routes with local organisations. They were also heard loudly, clearly and repeatedly asking for careers advice to assist them in identifying routes toward employment based on their interests and skills. This, they felt, would reduce the current feelings of hopelessness amongst young people and increase their optimism for the future.

Young people noted the need for youth-centred activities within the community to prevent their peers from entering into less positive activities, and mentors to provide positive role models. Sports such as football, basketball, going to theme parks, rugby, horse-riding and tennis were popular choices of activities they'd also like to see being offered.

Young people wanted to see opportunities advertised through school talks, on TV, through Twitter and Facebook and on posters in their areas. Finally, they wanted us, as services committed to young people, to stay motivated and keep doing our best for the young people we serve.

How we have responded and plans for the future

Driving the Purple Bus around Hackney to tell young people what we do

After hearing anecdotally about the concern that young people had about gang violence and wanting services to provide opportunities in places they felt safe (e.g. within their community and at youth centres), we went to specific areas affected by gang violence and liaised with youth services there to set up a 'street therapy' outreach service in order to provide preventative emotional support and respond to traumatic incidents in the area through psycho-education, screening and evidence based 1:1 therapy.

We have planned a 'Tackling Gang Violence' conference, in partnership with Mind. The aim of the conference is to bring the voices of young people in Hackney to the forefront about the root causes of gang involvement. It will also offer us, as services committed to meeting the needs of young people in Hackney, a space within which to think of how we can work collaboratively in order to meet their needs better and reduce risk. As a result of the conference, we will create a 'call to action' that our young people's participation group at Off Centre will champion through local, regional and national policy groups as their 2013 campaign.

Young people seem to be missing the sense of family and belonging, so needed to create a stable emotional base. It suggested to us a need for family outreach and support workers, as well as systemic therapists to be based in these communities, perhaps offering parent support groups. This is an area we are committed to developing. In the meantime, we have a family mediation service in place, to offer young people support if domestic stress reaches a critical level. We have also developed our mentoring programme, in a way that not only provides a positive role model, but also offers them a sense of family. We have done this by introducing mentor and mentee group meetings on a fortnightly

basis; bringing everyone together as an Off Centre 'family'. Interestingly, the first activity this group all wanted to do together (given a totally open choice) was to have a family meal, "like roast chicken or roast lamb and potatoes".

The incentive of money was the third most likely reason that young people felt their peers were attracted to gang involvement. We have developed partnerships with other organisations to create pathways for young people into employment. Our Advice and Information Officer regularly offers employability training, and assistance with financial planning and budgeting. She has started joining the 'Street Therapy' outreach team to ensure that her advice and support can be reached by young people, within their own communities. We also offer volunteering opportunities internally and training sessions which will contribute to the likely success of young people in their search for employment in the future. We recruit inspirational young people as mentors. We train them, offer supervision and support, and pay them to mentor other young people. For each of our mentors, we provide a personal development plan and work alongside them to think through their aspirations for the future.

We assist them to identify skills and necessary qualifications they need to make their dreams more achievable, and contribute financially to enable them to undertake courses and training that will contribute to the success of this journey.

Young people were clear about wanting careers advice to assist them in identifying routes toward employment based on their interests and skills. It isn't an area that Off Centre currently offers, but we are now keenly committed to seeing whether this is something we could provide for young people in the future. In the meantime, we will ensure that we

are up to date with knowing which services now offer this and we'll signpost to these services, not only internally but also through our Advice and Information Officer out in the community.

Young people noted that they wanted activities that offered escapism-out of borough, as well as pursuits such as football, basketball, going to theme parks, rugby, horse-riding and tennis. For the rest of 2013, we will be offering a range of these activities, as well as speaking to youth centres and schools in our target communities to ensure that young people engaged through them are able to access these too.

In regards to marketing our opportunities, young people wanted us to do school talks, advertise on TV, through Twitter and Facebook and on posters in their areas. We have booked in school talks throughout 2013 to do just that. We would like to respond to the request of a TV advert, but currently cannot afford to do so. We have planned to step up our Twitter and Facebook activity from May 2013, to let everyone know what we are doing. Our mentors are assisting us in this regard, to check that their peers and young people in the community are able to follow our activity, participate when they wish to and access support.

We have put posters in many of the communities, about mentoring opportunities and conducted outreach visits to

services in our key postcode areas, to distribute leaflets and posters letting them know we are here, and what we do. We also drove a purple bus around Hackney, to all of our postcode areas, with posters on the sides and stopped to talk to young people about who we are, what we're here for and how to get involved!

Another issue arising anecdotally in the consultation we undertook, and also featuring in the Institute of Economic and Peace report, is the increase in numbers of stop and searches. In 2009, the median stop and searches were 210,000 as opposed to approximately 40,000 per year between 2003 – 2008. The London region is by far the most affected by stop and search laws in Engand and Wales accounting for nearly 45% of all stop and searches, despite only housing 14.6% of the population. Black British young men are disproportionately represented, accounting for 30% of all stop and searches in London but only representing 10% of the London population.[61] Anger about stop and searches appear to fuel hostility toward the police and build a lack of trust in adults in positions of authority. In response, we have contributed to the setting up of a 'Stop and Search' group, consisting of both young people and the police working together to explore ways of moving forward. One outcome of this will be a DVD resource and training workshop, delivered by young people to the police, about the impact of stop and search.

Finally, young people wanted us, as services committed to young people, to stay motivated and keep doing our best for the young people we serve. We can assure you, as a service that has been providing support for children and young people of Hackney for over 40 years, we certainly will.

keep asking us what we think - its good

▲ Young people let us know that they want us to keep giving them opportunities to have a voice

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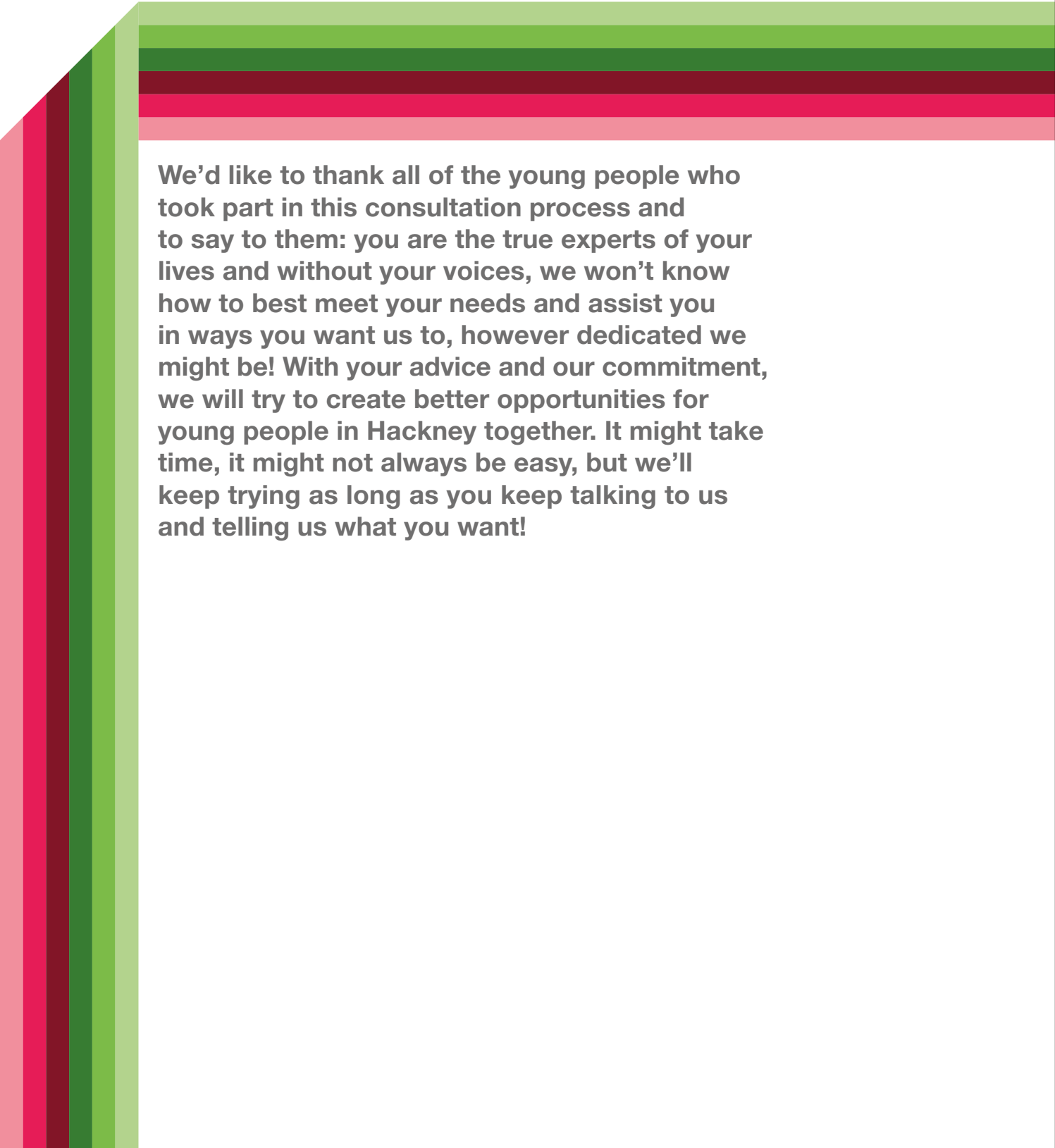
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Off Centre
25-27 Hackney Grove
London E83NR

Tel: 020 8986 4016
Web: www.offcentre.org.uk
Email: info@offcentre.org.uk

We'd like to thank all of the young people who took part in this consultation process and to say to them: you are the true experts of your lives and without your voices, we won't know how to best meet your needs and assist you in ways you want us to, however dedicated we might be! With your advice and our commitment, we will try to create better opportunities for young people in Hackney together. It might take time, it might not always be easy, but we'll keep trying as long as you keep talking to us and telling us what you want!