

COLLET HUNTER COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS: What more can be done to reduce violence in the community?

Produced by James Ross Hunter Youth Support; assisted by Civil Society Consulting CIC as part of Kinder Communities: Steps to Sustainability; a capacity-building programme for community organisations.



ABOUT

James Ross Hunter Youth Support was founded in 2014 by Collet Hunter, after the murder of her 18-year-old son, James, who died bravely saving another in his community from a gang attack. Working out of the TNG Youth and Community Centre in Sydenham, south London, Collet and her team deliver workshops and events to young people and parents to raise awareness of knife crime, gangs and exploitation, and to promote positive social values and wellbeing.

JRHYS brings the community together in the fight against violence, launching petitions, for example, for a one-minute London-wide silence acknowledging victims, as well as awareness events, such as Violence Awareness Month in May where a #1min4lives silence takes place in Lewisham for families who suffered loss to violence. The organisation is a frequent collaborator with Lewisham Council, as well as South London housing associations delivering programmes on public health and wellbeing. Most recently the organisation has worked with Hyde Housing Association, Phoenix Community Housing, and Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL).

The organisation was celebrated at the Faith & Belief Community Awards Forum for its role in 'inspiring youth' in 2023.

Civil Society Consulting CIC (CSC) is a London-based non-profit organisation. We want health, equality and social solidarity, and civil society organisations - charities, CICs, CIOs and faith organisations - are the key. Our role is to support, catalyse and energise them.



Kinder Communities
Steps to Sustainability



**James Ross Hunter Youth
Support CIC**

1. INTRODUCTION

Lewisham Council plays a vital role in contributing to the Safer Lewisham Partnership – and has commissioned James Ross Hunter Youth Services (JRHYS) to spearhead ‘Community Conversations’ to understand what local communities think can be done to reduce violence in the community.

Through delivering several community workshops and events, including ‘Sip and talk’, Parent ExPO, Safety Wellbeing Workshops, and a live theatre presentation of ‘YARD AWAY HOME: Celebrating the Voices of the Windrush Generation’, JRHYS collected 248 perspectives of young people and parents on strategies to reduce violence.

This report co-authored by JRHYS and Civil Society Consulting CIC (CSC) presents key findings from the ‘Community Conversations’ held over three months, focusing on strategies to reduce youth violence.

These findings will be pivotal in shaping the future direction and enhancing the existing approaches/strategies to reducing violence in Lewisham as part of strategic needs assessments (SNA) led by Lewisham Council.



2. CONTEXT

The plan to reduce serious violence in Lewisham

Lewisham is committed to reducing the prevalence of serious violence, defined by the Home Office as homicide, knife crime, gun crime and county lines drug dealing. This concerning trend in violence has seen an exponential rise. For example, from August 2021 to August 2022 in Lewisham, they witnessed an increase of 9.1% in recorded violence against people. Zoning in, compared to the previous year (2020), the following main crime categories are on the rise, with gun crime rising at 30%, sexual offences at 23%; while domestic abuse has seen a 12.3% increase. Interestingly, relative to the previous year, knife crime was reported to decrease at 8.3%. Lewisham has the 14th highest crime rate across the 32 London boroughs.

The effects/experience of serious violence have significant, long-lasting effects on children and young people, families and the wider community.

Some of these long-lasting effects include:

- physical and mental health consequences- physical injuries, PTSD, anxiety, depression;
- educational disruptions- lower education attainment, poor academic performance;
- emotional and social impact- difficulty forming healthy relationships, trust issues;
- community effects- decreased property values, reduced economic development and;
- loss of trust in institutions- underreporting and reduced cooperation with authorities.

The Safer Lewisham Partnership is the statutory Community Safety Partnership in Lewisham comprised of Lewisham Council, The Police, The Fire and Rescue Authority, Health Partners and Probation. This multi-agency group is working towards implementing the Safer Lewisham Partnership Plan, which has been developed in consultation with communities.

The Safer Lewisham Partnership Plan consists of three priorities (supported by three sub-groups) of which the implementation is overseen alongside the Safer Lewisham Partnership Board including:

- Domestic Abuse and VAWG;
- Community Engagement and;
- Delivering a Public Health Approach to tackling violence, with a focus on youth violence

As well as delivering on this plan, The Safer Lewisham Partnership are accountable for delivering on the outcomes/actions required by statutory duties including Serious Violence Duty and Combating Drugs Partnership.

Strategic Needs Assessments

Lewisham Council – as part of its role in delivering Safer Lewisham Partnership – is coordinating and conducting strategic needs assessments (SNA) under the Serious Violence Duty and Combating Drugs Partnership requirements.

As part of the strategic needs assessment (SNA) processes, local partner organisations in Lewisham are working together to understand how serious violence affects local communities. This supports them in developing a response strategy containing specific recommendations for action.

The SNA process is integral to a Public Health Approach to serious violence, to which the Safer Lewisham Partnership is committed.

A Public Health Approach involves multi-sectoral cooperation on the premise that violence results from multiple risk factors. SNA processes facilitate this, as they gather the views of a wide range of partners in local healthcare, education, employment and justice systems. Another key tenet of the Public Health Approach to tackling violence is that ‘it is done for and with communities’ and that is where engagement with the voluntary and the local community sector comes in.

Voluntary organisations have a particularly important role in contributing to SNAs and ensuring local partnerships take a public health approach to tackling serious violence more widely.

This is because voluntary organisations are trusted, know granular details of the communities they serve, and are set up to meet the needs that are not recognised by the statutory sector. On the other side of the same coin, voluntary sector organisations are often established, governed and staffed by the people they serve.

Therefore, voluntary organisations can give perspectives, thoughts and options that accurately reflect those of the community as they are close to them and often share their lived experience.

James Ross Hunter Youth Support

As part of the Lewisham community's SNA process, James Ross Hunter Youth Support (JRHYS) was commissioned to conduct 'Community Conversations' to gather community perspectives on knife crime, gangs, and exploitation. JRHYS is known in Lewisham as a highly trusted and dynamic organisation for raising awareness of knife crime, gangs, and exploitation.

Founder and CEO of JRHYS Collet is a long-standing partner/collaborator with Lewisham Council and is most recently a member of the Public Health Approach to Violence subgroup to oversee the effective delivery of outcomes in this area.

Working out of the TNG Youth and Community Center in Sydenham, Collet and her team deliver workshops and events to young people and parents to raise awareness of knife crime, gangs and exploitation, as well as to promote positive social values and wellbeing.

This report has been co-authored with Civil Society Consulting CIC, who are currently working with JRHYS as part of their programme: Kinder Communities: Steps to Sustainability, which delivers capacity-building support to grassroots organisations.

3. METHODOLOGY

Data collection

Propelled by its trusted reputation, JRHYS provides youth and families with numerous events and workshops in school settings and at the TNG Youth and Community Center in Sydenham. This has been instrumental to JRHYS developing a wide reach into the community.

It was an opportunity for JRHYS to have 'community conversations' by way of collecting perspectives on ways to reduce violence in the community as part of the process of gathering feedback after events.

JRHYS used a standardised form for collecting feedback on events and conducting these 'community conversations' between 25th April and 27th June. See photo.

At the end of the event, young people and their families completed anonymous forms, making them easier to use and store because they do not fall under the GDPR.

JRHYS used the following events to collect data:

Safety Wellbeing Events

Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, Safety Wellbeing Events are an ongoing and vital part of 'Community Conversations'. The events inform children and young people about safety via conversations, workshops and a 'theatre' platform.

JRHYS
JAMES ROSS HUNTER YOUTH SUPPORT EVENT
DATE OF EVENT 27.6.23
NAME OF EVENT S.P. + talk (Violence)
HOW SATISFIED WERE YOU? What did you like most?
Nice Place to meet like minded people
What did you like the least?
Finish - late for parents with kids
WHAT MORE CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE VIOLENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?
Promote good / safe places for young people
ANY OTHER COMMENT?

Workshop at Deptford Green Primary School SDG

JRHYS conducts monthly 'Youth Enrichment Workshops' for primary school students in Years 5 and 6. These interactive workshops are designed to encourage positive social values in youths and communities. Children learn how to keep safe in their community, what the police do to keep communities safe, and who to talk to if they feel unsafe. Children can ask questions and give feedback to the team about the workshops.



Parent Expo



Held in Brockley, Parent Expo was an event for parents, in which JRHYS participated. Speakers delivered talks on mental wellness and various community organisations shared their platform and services. Over 40 parents were in attendance.

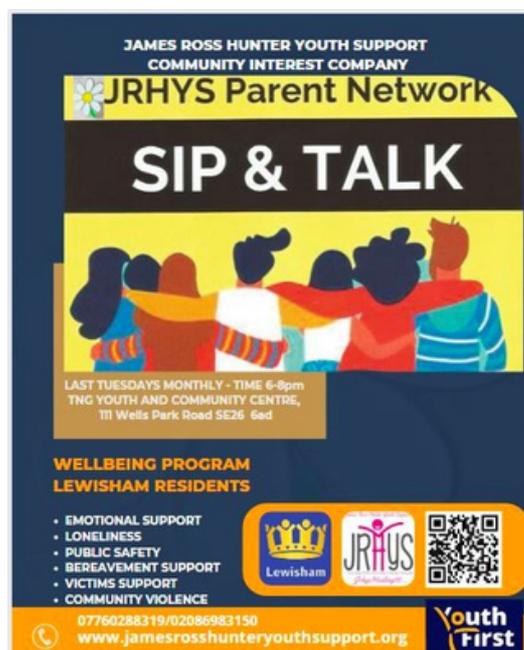
Yard Away Home

A one-off event made up of a live theatre presentation, music, dance, Caribbean food, and culture held at the TNG Youth and Community Centre. Co-created by Spontaneous Productions and JRHYS performances are based on real life stories collected in the borough by community members Jean Beckford and Matanah Maya. The event drew on the Windrush scandal of 2018 and how younger generations view those who came before them.



Sip & Talk

An emotional support group for families and friends to share and connect. Held at the TNG Youth and Community Centre every last Tuesday of the month.



Data analysis

In response to the question 'What more can be done in the community to reduce violence?', JRHYS collected 248 responses on paper. The next step was to conduct a thematic analysis to identify themes and trends.

Civil Society Consulting CIC (CSC) – a consultancy for the social sector – came on board to support JRHYS in conducting the thematic analysis and presenting the findings in this report.

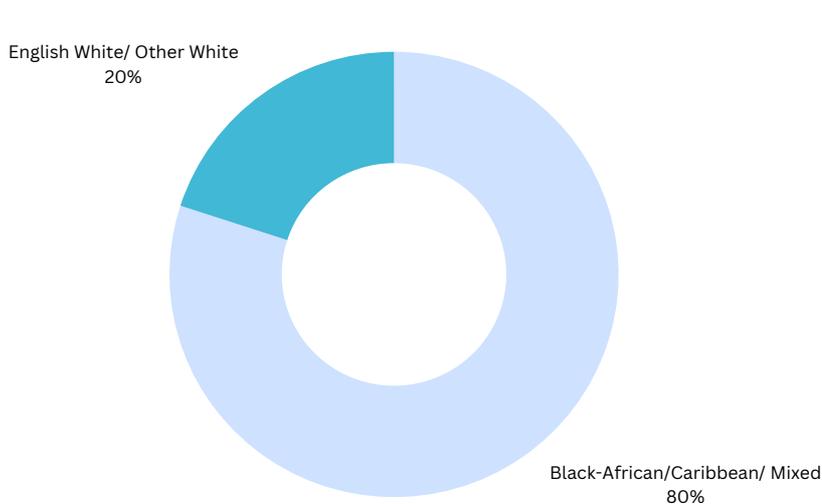
JRHYS and CSC 'digitised' all responses to the question by entering them into an Excel spreadsheet, separating responses from children and adults as each have different experiences with violence. Following this, the data was ready to be analysed into themes, which are presented in this report.

4. FINDINGS

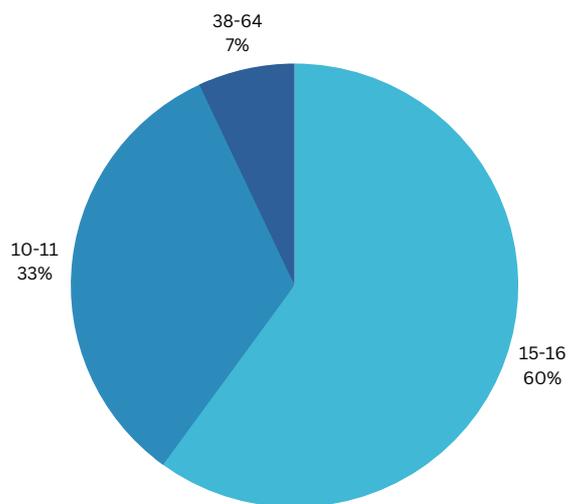
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

The participants in this research represented a diverse demographic, encompassing children spanning various age groups, and their parents hailed from a wide array of backgrounds. The gender distribution within the participants was evident in the statistics, with 37% being male and 63% female. In terms of racial and ethnic backgrounds, the majority, or 80%, identified as Black, African, Caribbean, or of Mixed heritage, while the remaining 20% identified as English White or Other White. Age-wise, the participants were distributed across different age brackets, with 60% falling in the 15-16 years range, 33% in the 10-11 years range, and a smaller 7% in the 38-64 years category. This rich diversity among the participants contributed to the rich data collected from the 'Community Conversations' with young people and parents.

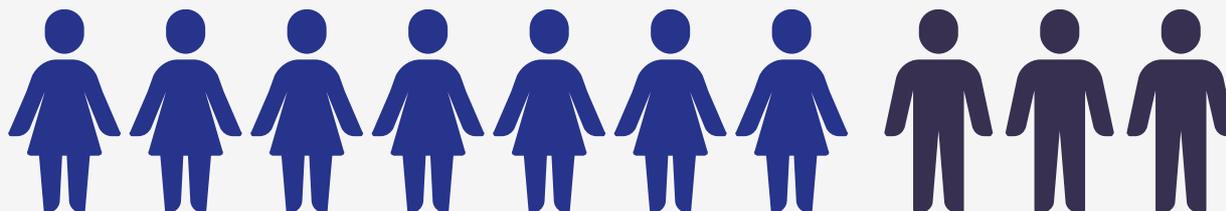
RACIAL ETHNICITY



AGE GROUP



GENDER



63% FEMALE | 37% MALE

YOUNG PEOPLE'S AND PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES

The findings from interviews with young people and parents revealed commonalities and notable differences in their perspectives on reducing violence in the community.

Parents' Perspectives:

Parents emphasised the significance of **early intervention**, underscoring the need for **educational initiatives, awareness campaigns, and ample support and resources for young individuals**. They stressed the effectiveness of **community involvement** in collaboratively crafting solutions.

Parents also acknowledged the pivotal role of **parental engagement and responsibility** in deterring young people from engaging in violent behaviour. To address these concerns, they proposed widening access to parenting support groups, viewing them as a means to boost parental confidence and overall well-being, thereby enhancing their ability to identify problematic behaviour.

While recognising the critical importance of providing support and resources for young people, parents acknowledged the impracticality of a one-size-fits-all approach. They recognised the necessity for **tailored activities** that specifically address the unique challenges faced by youth within the Lewisham community.

Young People's Perspectives:

Young people, like adults, recognised the value of youth centres, community spaces, education, and awareness campaigns. However, their focus was on more **immediate actions to reduce violence**. They proposed **practical measures** such as **staying in well-frequented areas when feeling unsafe, carrying safety alarms for emergencies, attaching personal locator devices to clothing for added security, and increased security measures, including heightened police presence around schools and bus stops**. Furthermore, there was greater mention of **stricter regulations on weapons**. One young participant suggested knives should not be available to use as weapons and that they should 'make non-sharp ones to cut fruit.'

Notably, young people offered more creative and optimistic approaches to mitigating community violence when compared to their parents. Their suggestions included **activism, fostering a more inclusive community, and addressing the underlying causes of violence**, such as socioeconomic inequalities. These ideas represent a more forward-looking and proactive stance among the younger generation towards making their community safer and more harmonious.

Below are the main themes pulled from the perspectives of 54 parents.



1. Community collaboration

The importance of **communities working together** to co-produce solutions on how to reduce violence via community workshops and meetings was a recurring theme highlighted by **24%** of the participants.

Respondents also mentioned that **positive communication and respect** need to be fostered among community members, particularly between community elders and the youth, which could be done via **intergenerational community events**.

Parents had the view it would be helpful to have regular updates on what is happening in the community via an **online newsletter**.



2. Support and resources for young people

A widespread view is that **early intervention** is a critical building block to reducing violence in the community. **50%** of the responses voiced that In practice, this looks like **increased funding and commissioning of youth centres and spaces** where young people can socialise and volunteer to do something good, gaining skills and confidence in the process.

The importance of **activities or initiatives that encourage teamwork and economic empowerment among young Black men** was especially noted. Boxing sessions can serve as a means to release stress rather than resort to violence among young people.

These spaces could also offer sessions for **young people to talk through challenges and find solutions with professionals**.

It was acknowledged that it is not always easy to get young people to participate in activities and **more outreach** is needed to engage young people effectively.

Parents also mentioned that **more career planning, extra-curricular activities and mentoring** on offer within schools would be beneficial.



3. Education and awareness

20% of parents cited the importance of workshops, events, and awareness programmes around knife crime, exploitation, and gangs in schools and youth centres. These events should be held in primary schools as well as secondary schools to make sure children are aware of these issues when they begin to experience them. Other parents suggested workshops on emotional training, meditation, and inner peace for children.

Children need more opportunities to hear positive stories about their histories and identities, and more outlets to express their experiences of discrimination and combat it peacefully.



4. Parental involvement and responsibility

It was suggested by 4% of the responses that parents could access support groups that increase their confidence in parenting, and support them to look after their own wellbeing.



5. Cultural sensitivity

Youth centres should be geared towards the specific challenges that young Black children experience as voiced by 2% of the respondents. Activities that promote well-being and provide an outlet to release stress can help children develop healthy coping mechanisms. Activities should also be developed for specific ethnic/cultural groups within the community (ie. the Somali community) who experience even more nuanced challenges.



Perspectives of 54 parents



Support and resources for young people

“ More mentors and community activities for young children ”

50%



Community collaboration

“ Letting the community know how they can help ”

24%



Education and awareness

“ Reach out to the primary school children and teach them about gang violence at an early stage ”

20%



Parental involvement and responsibility

“ Parents can do a lot more by taking full responsibility in raising their children to be upstanding citizens ”

4%



Cultural sensitivity

“ More workshops, more people being made aware of the issues in youth today ”

2%

Below are the main themes pulled from the perspectives of 193 school children.



1. Increased police presence and security measures

14% of children responded to the question 'What can be done to reduce violence in the community?' with different ideas for **security measures**, for example:

- Implementation of CCTV cameras on streets (particularly in small alleyways) and having more police presence
- Use of trackers on knives and other weapons
- Safety alarm pins or devices attached to clothing



2. Youth centres and community spaces

Similar to adults, children recognised the need for **more community and youth centres**, which can host activities and workshops for young people. 23% said these spaces could be the sites for one-to-one mentoring or peer support groups for individuals who have experienced and/or are engaging in violence.

One child recognised the **cyclical nature of crime** and suggested that people who have lost someone through knife crime should be supported, so they do not commit crimes themselves.

It was suggested workshops **focusing on wellbeing, calmness and meditation**, which support individuals to control their anger and emotion would be useful for young people.

Additionally, many young people do not find a sense of identity and belonging through school and academic work. There should be **a range of activities on offer**, so young people can find activities that they enjoy and that encourage their personal growth.



3. Spreading awareness and education

9% of children discussed the need for **workshops** in school, and also for adults, about the **dangers of knife crime and how to keep safe**. One child mentioned that the widespread belief that knives are needed for personal safety must be dispelled and challenged. It was also mentioned that important topics such as **mental health** need to be discussed more in schools.



4. Peaceful protests and campaigns to promote peace

In contrast to parents, children had hope in systems changing through activism in the form of peaceful protests, posters and activities to raise awareness about violence. 9% of children suggested social media, websites, films and even theatre to spread awareness about safety and wellbeing.



5. Regulations and bans

Children often mentioned stricter laws and regulations regarding weapons at 7%, for example, licensing systems for carrying knives or guns and prohibition of alcohol, pubs, and websites selling weapons.



6. Addressing root causes

Although the majority of children advocated for immediate deterrents of violence (increased policing, CCTV and stricter laws on weapons), 20% of children referred to root causes of violence that need to be addressed: discrimination, lack of employment and financial insecurity of young people.



7. Building a more welcoming and inclusive community

Children identified that communities that support and care for each other prevent violence and conflict. 12% highlighted that this could be facilitated by activities that focus on promoting positive interactions and understanding different perspectives and life experiences.



8. Communication

6% of children expressed a desire for more opportunities and accessible ways to report problems and seek support from trusted individuals. It was acknowledged people do not always feel empowered to report crimes to authorities, and there needs to be more support for individuals to do so.



Perspectives of 193 school children

Communication



“ Try and speak to the people you trust around you ”

6%

Regulations and bans



“ Make it illegal to carry knives and/or other blades and weapons freely ”

7%

Spreading awareness and education



“ Spread awareness that violence isn't right ”

9%

Peaceful protests and campaigns to promote peace



“ More peaceful protests and campaigns on peace and happiness in our community ”

9%

Building a more welcoming and inclusive community



“ Having a more welcoming community to avoid any problems and violence between people ”

12%

Increased police presence and security measures



“ CCTV cameras on every street or at least one policeman/woman on a lot of streets ”

14%

Addressing root causes



“ Giving youth more jobs with benefits and profits ”

20%

Youth centres and community spaces



“ More youth clubs to connect with each other and socialise ”

23%

RECOMMENDATIONS

Informed by this extensive community engagement exercise, JRHYS and CSC have developed a series of recommendations for the Lewisham Safety Partnership to reduce violence community such as:

- **Continue community workshops** and meetings which provide a platform to co-produce solutions to violence reduction.
- **Fund local organisations** to organise intergenerational community events.
- **Create more accessible ways** for young people to report crimes; young people repeatedly mentioned the need for outlets to report crimes to the police or adults.
- **Continue to commission expert / lived-experience-led organisations** to share knowledge, and experience and facilitate conversation among young people. This is best done via assemblies and workshops, which are tailored and culturally specific. Particularly useful topics include:
 - How to keep safe, help others, and report crime;
 - Wellbeing, meditation and managing stress;
 - Mental health;
 - Positive narratives about Black UK communities and Black history.
- **Create and maintain safe spaces** for young people to:
 - Share grief/receive support if they/ or their families have been affected by crime;
 - Gain employability and creative skills.
- **Facilitate spaces/ events** where individuals can protest peacefully and have constructive and healing conversations about the prevalence of serious violence, inequalities and discrimination in the community.
- **Use social media** to get communities talking about personal safety and wellbeing.
- **Increase funding** for career planning, extra-curricular activities and mentoring at school.
- **Fund and commission peer support groups** for parents.