

Submission to the Youth Violence Commission in the United Kingdom

Submitted via e-mail

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Youth Violence Commission. Our submission focuses on research conducted into public health model approaches to youth involvement in violence (Klose 2019), as well as the impact of negative language and imagery in the media and the discriminatory and negative stereotyping of children in conflict with the law more widely (Gordon 2007; 2012; 2016; 2018). Our joint submission draws on our combined expertise of having researched, written and published in these areas.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss any aspects of our submission, recommendations and wider research further with members of the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

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The Learning from a Comparative Analyses

To prevent and reduce young people's involvement in violence, as well as the victimisation and demonisation of young people, this submission proposes that a holistic and interdisciplinary, professional public health approach be implemented into youth justice systems on a global scale (Robertson 2017). This multi-agency approach could consider and prioritise the holistic needs of children and young people to avoid further unnecessary, yet in reality, very damaging consequences of criminalisation and stigmatisation (McVie 2011). These therapeutic and more restorative responses to violence in particular, focus primarily on the wellbeing and future prospects of the child or young person, steering them away from traditional methods of punishment, including youth justice centres and juvenile prisons (Young, Greer & Church 2017). Furthermore, this submission will explore such alternatives to criminalisation and through an international comparative lens, will examine and reflect on the integration of a public health approach which has evidenced as being successful in Scotland.

Youth justice in Victoria (Australia) offers an interesting contextual case study example, as there has been a recent shift in the models of practice which have moved from a health and welfare arrangement, to the responsibilities being placed in the justice policy portfolio (Legal and Social Issues Committee 2018). Additionally, the media reporting and political references to children and young people as a social group, often draw on negative narratives and demonising constructs which subsequently manifest significant levels of fear within the community. Although Victoria's crime rate has remained stable over the last 12 months (Crime Statistics Agency 2019), the platforms of social media and negative reporting are instilling fear within the community, with Victoria having the highest levels of fear of crime in Australia (Towell & Butt 2019).

Ongoing Research

Using a children's rights-based framework, the larger programme of focused research from which this submission is derived examines children's and young people's perceived involvement in violence, as well as the public's attitudes towards 'youth crime' in both Australia and the United Kingdom (UK). It explores several core research questions, including:

- 1) How are public health models responding to children and young people in conflict with the law elsewhere and would this approach have relevancy in Victoria, Australia?
- 2) What is the impact of stigmatisation of young people by media outlets and political discourse?
- 3) Have the recent legislation changes produced more punitive responses within the Victorian youth justice system and can we learn from elsewhere in order to ensure that children's rights approaches are prioritised and international rights obligations are met?

The study explores the evidence-based public health approaches which are visible in Scotland to respond to violence in communities (Black *et al.* 2019). The study includes quantitative analysis of online media content over a six-month period between 1 February 2019 and 31 July 2019 and qualitative data was also collected through 25 semi-structured interviews with practitioners, policymakers and academics within the youth justice sphere in Australia and the UK.

Submission

Perceptions of Children's and Young People's Involvement in Violence

To improve the society's typically negative perceptions of children and young people in conflict with the law (see Gordon 2018), it is important to reframe the negative narratives around youth 'gangs' as well as contextualise the '*current crisis of knife crime*' (Interviewee - University Academic) in the UK. In the study, many interviewees referred to the realities of young people's lives, as well as their often-neglected victimisation: '*young people who are involved in gangs ... may come into contact and use knives against each other*' (Interviewee - University Academic). As qualitative content analysis of media coverage and interviews with practitioners and academics have confirmed, '*knife crime*' is framed as a persistent and worrying concern in media discourse (Allen & Audickas 2018).

However, as critical research demonstrates children and young people are often forced to carry knives for personal protection, which is therefore representative of their lack of trust in police officers to respond to incidents of violence (Shaw *et al.* 2011). Several research participants from the UK commented on what was referred to as the '*symptoms of violence*', which further reinforced a construction of violence with infectious diseases:

'violence is viewed as a disease that can be inoculated against and prevented if the right interventions are put in place at the right time' (Interviewee - University Academic).

This quote reveals the need to identify and address the reasons behind why young people find themselves in situations of needing to carry knives or related weapons, with such circumstances including histories of family violence, low socioeconomic statuses and gang affiliations present in their lives (Hawkins *et al.* 2000, p. 2). Additionally, several of the participants based in both the UK and Australia mentioned the premise of youth violence and offending in society without being prompted by a direct question on violence. This is significant to the research findings, as it highlights young people's involvement in violence are strikingly evident within public discourse and media coverage at an international level (White 2004).

In terms of preventing youth violence through systematic, holistic approaches, the establishment of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) in 2006 was a progressive milestone which, '*always focused on the needs of young people*' (Interviewee – University Academic). Since investing in this approach, Scotland's homicide rate has halved between 2008 and 2018, with the number of hospital admissions related to knife crime falling by 62% (Evans 2018). Hence, it is with this primary focus on prevention and not punishment, that the VRU can effectively respond to incidents, such as knife crime, and to address the reasons for violence through a multi-agency approach (Conaglen & Gallimore 2014).

Media Representations, Political Discourse and the Fear of Crime

Previous literature has examined how the media's amplification of deviance has contributed to the creation of 'moral panics' and 'folk devils', with certain vulnerable groups and populations demonised in contemporary society (Young 1971; Cohen 1972; Chibnall 2013; Hall *et al.* 1978), with contemporary studies such as Gordon's (2018) demonstrating the dangers such coverage poses to young people's safety and well-being.

As Muncie (2014, p. 7) argues, the role of the media plays an integral role in the escalation of fear in the community. Media coverage can also influence the wider community perceptions and fear of certain sections of the community (Gordon 2018), which is generally unfounded. Several professionals interviewed, commented on language utilised by the media, including the stereotypical labels used to demonise children and young people:

'inherently bad...thugs...violent monsters...those are all words I have seen used in the headlines about these children and young people' (Interviewee – Commissioner for Children and Young People).

It is evident that media outlets, more than any other source, have the most significant influence on the public's perception of crime (see Muraskin & Domash 2007; Clifford & White 2017; Gordon 2018). As outlined by Curiel and Bishop (2018, pp. 1-3), there is often a 'mismatch' between levels of crime and fear of becoming a victim of violent crime, which directly refers to the 'causal relationship' between relentless media content and 'subsequent public perception' (McNair 2009, pp. 21-22). Hence, the negative, '*media framing*' (Interviewee - Lawyer) not only triggers significant fear within the community, but it also supports the underlying myth that, '*we are living in a dangerous society*' (Interviewee – University Academic).

Like media discourse, politicians also play a major role in the construction and portrayal of children and young people's involvement in anti-social behaviour and crime (Gordon 2018). According to Newburn (2007) politicians often use the 'get tough on crime' mantra to assist their election prospects. This political obsession with punitive responses to 'react' to what is framed as 'youth offending' strengthens the divide between punitive political discourse in policy and what can often be more 'welfarist' commitments advocated for by practitioners (McAra 2004). As noted by Whyte (2003, p. 74), children and young people who are framed as 'persistent' in their offending have become a key focus for politicians to demonstrate to potential voters that they have the policy and practice solutions to the problem. One interviewee highlighted that their assurance to the wider community is:

'...entirely for political agenda, political gain, to satisfy the public, who developed a view of youth offending that's been shaped and misshaped by politicians and media...' (Interviewee - University Academic).

Stemming from this finding, it is evident that political discourse around children and young people in conflict with the law has a direct impact on this marginalised population in terms of how they are portrayed, represented and subsequently treated (Gordon 2018, p. 26). One interviewee argued that the discourse is typically, '*managed around an imagined punitive...that holds the ballot paper strings*' (Interviewee - University Academic). This therefore prompts a 'right-thinking' mindset (Cohen 1972, p. 9) within a misinformed society who typically, '*want quick results*' (Interviewee – Youth Worker) in response to youth crime.

Abuse, Trauma and Mental Health: realities for children and young people

An appreciation of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) are critical when considering how best to respond to violence within a community. According to Sacks, Murphy and Moore (2014), ACE's are highly traumatic events that can have long-term impacts on a child in terms of their overall health and wellbeing. In critically analysing the impact of ACE's, it has been recognised that many children and young people in conflict with the law are:

'subject to abuse ... and the end result is of course criminal behaviour ... hence the need for more therapeutic treatment for young people' (Interviewee - Lawyer).

This finding is reflective of the association between what is referred to as 'criminal behaviour' and the experience of trauma or maltreatment as a child or young person (Yick 2013). In addition, Cashmore (2011, p. 36) highlights that the youth justice system must acknowledge and respond to their needs and trauma by ensuring that children and young people have access to appropriate support services and various youth organisations. Furthermore, it is argued that the wider community, particularly those individuals whose views align with popular punitive youth justice practices (Pratt 2000, p. 144), must critically examine the context in which children and young people have navigated many incidents of trauma and violence, often leading to them coming into conflict with the law:

'people need to understand the backgrounds of the young people that are committing those offences ... often there's just huge rates of trauma in the lives of young people' (Interviewee - University Academic).

'Trauma-informed practices' are vital in the context of youth justice as they are dedicated to providing support to children who have previously suffered from systemic abuse and neglect (Bush 2018, p. 74). This *'trauma-informed'* (Interviewee – University Academic) practice has been particularly welcomed in Scotland (Sweeney & Taggart 2018):

'...adverse childhood experiences was something that was fundamental to the Scottish model being successful' (Interviewee – Founder of Youth Organisation).

However, a trauma-informed approach is still in its early development in England and Wales, as one participant recognised that, *'...there needs to be more support for practitioners in terms of trauma and support'* (Interviewee – University Academic). Hence, while there is minimal evidence to suggest that adopting a trauma-informed approach has been successful in England, Wales and Australia, it is clear that local agencies within these jurisdictions could do much more to ensure holistic and collaborative approaches are appropriately designed and appropriately funded. This will ensure that a child's or a young person's needs are contextualised within the trauma and adversity they have experienced (Bush 2018, p. 309) and responded to with sensitivity to context and life experience.

Racism and Discriminatory Practices

There is widespread public perception that 'youth gangs' are a major problem in Australia, specifically in Victoria (White 2004). This is reinforced by media images of groups of young people framed as 'gangs'

involved in what is referred to as ‘youth violence’ (Gordon 2018, p. 92) and the frequent negative pronouncements by politicians about particular youth groups, including Indigenous and Sudanese youth, and the introduction of punitive measures, such as ‘overly strict bail limitations and continual investment in building more youth detention precincts’ (Victorian Council of Social Service 2017, p. 3). As identified by one participant, it is evident that within the Victorian Parliament, there are politicians and, *‘policymakers saying “don’t worry, we’re going to lock up ... you’re not going to have to worry about youth gangs breaking into your home at night” ...’* (Interviewee – Youth Worker).

The above quotation reflects the findings of Cunneen, Goldson and Russell (2016) as they outline the prominence of political agendas, including the discourses around punitiveness and ‘law and order’ approaches (Legal and Social Issues Committee 2018, p. 15). Furthermore, the idea of community safety is evidently susceptible to political expediency at the expense of overlooking international standards of children’s rights. Significantly, one academic who works with vulnerable groups has recognised the implications of these responses, stating that:

‘there are political and media narratives about African gangs and youth crime... particularly the demonisation of young South Sudanese people’ (Interviewee – University Academic).

Another interviewee notably commented on the prevalence of, *‘xenophobia towards young gangs’* (Interviewee – Lawyer) in Victoria, which has the potential to socially marginalise and exclude children and young people. During interviews with youth justice professionals, many participants argued that the existing knowledge of ‘gangs’ must be challenged and must go beyond stereotypes and presumptions towards certain groups of young people (White 2007). This is reflective of White’s argument (1996, pp. 305-306) which outlines that ‘ethnic youth gangs’ are often framed by the media through one-sided images and certain stereotypes.

Furthermore, the racism that is also prevalent with the increase in stop and search powers, which is shown to disproportionately affect young black males, who are often searched for drugs, needs to be challenged and acknowledged in any discussion of reform (Brown 2019, p. 3). According to Bowling and Weber (2011, p. 480), the words ‘stop’ and ‘police’ assert authority, power and control which ultimately emphasises coercive practices towards particular groups (Hall *et al.* 1978). In recognising this, one participant from the UK asserted that, *‘stop and search in London is absolutely proven to be racially profiled ... you’re 9 times more likely to be stopped and searched if you’re black than if you’re white’* (Interviewee – Chief Executive). This therefore underlines the clear racial disparity within the criminal justice system which subsequently is fed by existing discriminatory practices being carried by the role of the police in UK (Townsend 2018).

Care-experienced Children and Young People

There are significant concerns regarding the treatment of children and young people in the child protection system as well as youth detention and custody centres. This is particularly prevalent at the Don Dale youth detention centre in the Northern Territory in Australia, where children and young people have previously been mistreated, verbally abused, humiliated and isolated for extensive periods of time (Gordon & Fitz-Gibbon 2018). These incidents have subsequently prompted a response by the Australian Government who convened a Royal Commission in 2017 into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory (UN Human Rights Council 2017, p. 2).

Cunneen, Goldson and Russell (2016) argue that youth custody should be considered as a last resort and as the international children's rights instruments outline, for the shortest possible time, under Article 37(b) of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The participants interviewed felt that as an, *'alternative to the criminalisation'* (Interviewee – University Academic) and detention of children and young people, there needs to be a stronger focus on restorative justice practices in Victoria and the UK. They asserted that there needs to be more options for diversionary programs, as well as multiple support services working together to implement early interventions to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violent crime (Brown 2019).

Many interviewees proposed that the governments in the UK and Victoria must adopt a public health framework, which incorporates a, *'robust child protection system...strengthens diversion'* (Interviewee – University Academic) and undermines law and order responses to youth crime (Reiner 2007, p. 327). The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (2009-2020) report identifies a public health approach to child wellbeing which considers the risks and vulnerabilities of children and young people, as well as the need for prevention and early intervention. Supporting the recommendations outlined in this report, one Victorian politician recognised that:

'if we were to take a public health approach, we would be dealing with those health issues...we would be recognising that we could provide early intervention...including wraparound services for the families' (Interviewee – Political Representative).

Furthermore, there have also been extensive recommendations outlined in the review of the youth justice system in Victoria, written by Armytage and Ogloff (2017), which has set the foundation for many proposed reforms concerning the welfare and treatment of children and young people who experience the child protection system. In terms of risk and protective factors, abuse, trauma and mental health are highly poignant factors when it comes to exploring reasons for children's coming into conflict with the law and the resulting interaction with various aspects of the criminal justice system (Baidawi & Sheehan 2019). Moreover, the key to a successful child protection system is to develop and outline a strong vision as well as strengthen stability and permanency in care arrangements for children and young people (Wise 2017, p. 20).

Punitive versus Restorative

In March 2018, the Victorian Government in Australia enacted a 'law and order' campaign which involved transferring over from a welfare to a justice model, focusing more on punishment (Legal and Social Issues Committee 2018, p. 15). As outlined earlier in this submission, there was a clear and distinct 'attitudinal change' in some parts of the Victorian community, including the Victorian Parliament, away from rehabilitation and transformative 'optimism' towards more punitive responses (Legal and Social Issues Committee 2018, p. 15). These key legislative changes, including amendments to sentencing laws and bail restrictions, was recognised by one Australian academic, who commented that:

'a law and order approach towards criminal justice has certainly led to more punitive approaches towards things like public order... sentencing and bail orders don't really take adequate consideration of how that impacts on children' (Interviewee – University Academic).

However, a tough on crime or ‘law and order’ approach is not the most progressive step in addressing the rights and needs of children and young people who come into conflict with the law (Jaffe & Baker 1999). Furthermore, as a genuine alternative to the traditional criminal justice system (Blagg 1985), restorative justice practices have been extensively trialled within the youth justice sphere in Australia, England and Wales (Cunneen & Goldson 2015, p. 6). In England, restorative justice approaches have been introduced as, *‘referral order[s]’* (Interviewee – University Academic), where if the child young person pleads guilty, they are instead referred to a youth panel (Crawford & Newburn 2003), however there is much to analyse in relation to the need for an admission of ‘guilt’.

Within Australia, some examples of restorative justice approaches include youth conferencing and family group conferencing, which are both managed either through a diversionary youth conference directed by the prosecutor for less serious offences or through a court-ordered conference (Muir 2014, pp. 6-7). One participant from Victoria acknowledged that:

‘we’ve had group conferencing in our youth justice system for quite a long time ... Magistrates certainly talk about examples of group conferencing and how they’ve had such a significant positive impact on the young person’ (Interviewee – Commissioner for Children and Young People).

Another participant from the UK argued that restorative justice approaches have facilitated a platform for, *‘young people to reflect on their circumstances and then what has led them to do whatever it is they’ve done’* (Interviewee – Founder of Youth Organisation). However, despite these claims of success across the youth justice system, several Australian interviewees also argued that, *‘restorative justice has been significantly under-utilised in Victoria’* (Interviewee – University Academic) and that, *‘there’s so much more potential for it to be used more widely in Victoria’* (Interviewee – University Academic).

Based on these findings, it is evident that interviewees felt that restorative justice practices need to be applied and for the systems to maximise these vital resources in order to reduce children’s and young people’s contact with the criminal justice system. However, without full acknowledgement of structural failings and existing inequalities (for example, socio-economic inequalities and discrimination), restorative justice as it is currently most widely utilised, still potentially places blame at the level of the individual.

Children’s Rights

The end of 2019 marked the 30th anniversary since Australia and the UK signed up to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), however many children and young people are still subjected to harm and abuse within the youth justice and child protection systems (UNICEF 2018; Gordon 2019). In examining these significant violations of children’s rights, one participant from the UK highlighted that, *‘the crucial thing is to respect children’s rights, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child’* (Interviewee – Chief Executive). Another participant also recognised that the importance of human rights are often downplayed and ignored once children and young people come into conflict with the criminal justice system and that, *‘children lose their universal rights in the eyes of some professionals, the system anyway, once they break the law’* (Interviewee – University Academic).

Moreover, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has observed that Australia’s youth justice systems require substantial reforms for the systems to conform to international standards (CRC October 2019). This criticism builds on the rising concerns that Australia’s minimum age of criminal responsibility

of 10-years-old is too low (O'Brien & Fitz-Gibbon 2018 p. 201). Significantly, England and Wales also hold the same minimum age of criminal responsibility across its jurisdictions, which therefore provides, *'the option of criminalising children'* (Interviewee – University Academic). A report submitted by the Australian Government to the UNCRC in January 2018 did not express an intention to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility, despite the recommendation made by the UNCRC in 2005 and 2012, that Australia should raise the age *'to an internationally acceptable level'* (Law Council of Australia 2018, p. 30; CRC October 2019). In response to this evidence, one Australian academic commented:

'with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child...we're signatory to that...it's just a joke that we continue to lock up children who are 10, 11, 12 years old' (Interviewee – University Academic).

Furthermore, previous research within both Australia and the UK has highlighted the need to raise the age of criminal capacity to 14-years-old (O'Brien & Fitz-Gibbon 2017; Fitz-Gibbon & O'Brien 2018; McGuinness 2016). One participant argued that to achieve this, policymakers and stakeholders need to, *'teach children about their human rights and you ensure that they have a voice'* (Interviewee – University Academic) so that children's rights are explicitly recognised and implemented within the criminal justice system and all systems that children and young people may come into contact with. Hence the marginalised voices of children and young people must, *'have a genuine voice'* (Interviewee – University Academic) and their needs acknowledged within international youth justice policies and practices.

Public Health Model Approach

Over the last two decades, the public health approach has been internationally recognised as an effective primary model in responding to, and preventing children and young people's involvement in violence (Higgins 2014). The launch of the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) has triggered public and policy debates on tackle serious violence utilising a different approach. This approach ultimately addresses four key components: the underlying factors of violence and why it occurs; the magnitude and scope of violence; ways to prevent violence; and finally, applying a range of interventions and determining the effectiveness of these approaches (The UK House of Commons 2018, p. 3).

One interviewee from Glasgow, Scotland asserted that, *'...a violence reduction unit in Scotland has very much drawn upon a public health perspective'* (Interviewee – University Academic). Demonstrating recognition of this international model, one interviewee from Victoria, Australia insightfully maintained that, *'the Scottish model has been quite different to the rest of the UK...it's a model that has always focused on the needs of young people'* (Interviewee – University Academic).

Several participants also introduced the concept of *'a risk and protective factor paradigm'* (Interviewee – University Academic), which suggests why certain groups of children and young people are more or less likely to become victims of crime. According Haines and Case (2008, p. 14), this can be achieved by reducing potential risk factors and enhancing protective factors:

'I'd basically see a public health model as one that brings to the forefront the considerations of having social determinants...that the context around the youth justice system is the reason for young people committing offences' (Interviewee – University Academic).

Another participant from the UK, acknowledged that a public health approach is, *'inclusive of all parts of society...it's the bridge between our health, our police, our social care, the community and the children...it all works together'* (Interviewee – Founder of Youth Organisation). This further supports the integration of a holistic approach which requires different governments and agencies to collaborate and co-operate together to achieve shared goals for children and young people, as well as the wider community (McDonald & Rosier 2011, p. 3).

Future Research and Key Recommendations

Many politicians, practitioners and academics within the international youth justice debate have advocated for a public health approach to reduce youth violence. This study upon which this submission is derived, has contributed to addressing an existing gap in the comparative literature.

Scotland has successfully adopted a public health approach to tackling violence which includes prevention strategies, such as education and early intervention, coupled with appropriate law enforcement (World Health Organisation 2002). Thus, in considering that youth violence is linked to a range of contextual factors, which mainly stem from socio-economic inequality and discrimination, this study's findings propose that it is therefore necessary to invest in more suitable community-based and alternative approaches which address these issues before they emerge.

Many participants interviewed for this study agreed that both youth justice systems in Australia and the UK have been structured in a way that is failing to effectively consider the social determinants and factors linked to children's and young people's involvement in violence. Therefore, it is essential for governments and policymakers to consider the views of children, young people and their advocates, which confirm that trauma and abuse is a highly significant issue, and to apply more therapeutic approaches which strengthen and reflect the ethos of the international instruments for protecting children's rights within the criminal justice system. Thus, the aim should be to understand why children and young people are engaged in what is deemed as violent behaviour, as well as addressing their individual needs and previous trauma. It was acknowledged by participants that adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) can ultimately impact the lives and future prospects of a child or young person, hence it is crucial to implement and prioritise more 'trauma-informed' practices.

Aside from the clear recommendations to implement a public health approach, there is also a need to raise the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14-years-old in Australia and the rest of the UK, which is in line with the latest UN recommendations published as the Concluding Observations in early October 2019 (CRC October 2019). While the current age is 10-years-old within these jurisdictions, the United Nations have recently released their new General Comment on 'child justice', outlining that it is an international obligation to increase the minimum age to at least 14-years-old (CRC 2019, para. 22). Additionally, with the Scottish Parliament raising its age of criminal responsibility to 12-years-old in May 2019, it is evident that Australia, England and Wales have become even more isolated from other Western countries which have a much higher age of criminal responsibility, such as Sweden, Poland and Germany (Jehle, Lewis & Sobota 2008, p. 239).

It was acknowledged by participants that powerful influences, including media outlets and politicians, are primarily focussed on manifesting fear within the community which triggers a 'moral panic' towards this younger population (Cohen 1972; Gordon 2018). According to one participant, *'the negative narratives*

and demonising constructs' (Interviewee – University Academic) are having multiple damaging effects on children and young people in conflict with the law, who are framed and perceived as a threat to society. This finding is significant as it highlights that it is vital to, 'give these young people an actual voice' (Interviewee – University Academic), as well as critically examine the harmful impact of these counterproductive narratives (Gordon 2018).

Furthermore, it was revealed in the interviews with professionals that public health responses are critical in addressing the individuals needs as well as proactively protecting and promoting the rights of children and young people. Based on the emergence of these findings, this submission has demonstrated the strong correlations existing between the contextual factors and the social determinants of health and children's and young people's involvement in violence. The qualitative data analysis in this study has provided a foundation of recommendations for future reforms, outlining that we must continue to critique and assess the relevancy of a public health approach to prevent youth violence in order to encourage more 'child-friendly' practices at national and international levels. The key next step would be to ensure that the voices and experiences of children and young people are listened to and at the heart of all future reforms in this area.

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