

The X-*it* Programme:

Item **5**

**A Submission to The Home Affairs Committee
Inquiry into Black People and the Criminal
Justice System**

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SUBMISSION TO THE HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO YOUNG BLACK PEOPLE AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

THE X-IT PROGRAMME

Lambeth Children and Young People's Service

The **X-it** Programme has been designed in order to offer a modular programme of intensive support and self-esteem building to young people who are at risk of gang membership.

The programme was designed in response to the gang murder of a young person, Adrian Marriott in Brixton in the Summer 2004. The fatal shooting of Adrian led to a palpable fear amongst young people in Brixton who started to vocalise their concerns to youth workers about the gang culture and the increasing force being used to convert them to a corrupt form of Islam. These young people wanted out.

1. THE AIMS OF THE X-IT PROGRAMME

- To reduce levels of weapon use and serious crime in a target group of young people identified as being at risk of progressing to more serious levels of crime.
- To develop young people's self awareness and sense of identity, empowering them towards informed decision making independent of peer and street culture
- To identify and nurture a core group of young leaders who will inform future initiatives addressing this target group

Objectives

- To empower young people to make positive choices
- To increase levels of self awareness
- To further develop young people's sense of responsibility for themselves and for their actions
- To facilitate the expression of anger in positive ways
- To increase the social skills with peers and adults
- To further develop self-esteem
- To experience the support and confidence that a positive group can offer
- To develop a sense of personal achievement through engaging in challenges

2. THE PROGRAMME

The methodology and underpinning ethos of the **X-it** Programme uses clear Youth Work principals and practice. It also progresses young people through the five desired outcomes identified by "The Every Child Matters" agenda. Bernard Davies in "Youth Work: A Manifesto For Our times" (Youth & Policy 2005) outlines the key underlying elements that come together to make Youth Work distinct from other professions and the **X-it** Programme clearly has a number of these critical elements seated at the heart of it's design and delivery. These include:

2.1 The Programme Concentrates on “needs” not “deeds”

The Lambeth Youth & Play Service runs the programme and whilst working alongside agencies within the Criminal Justice System (such as the YOT and the Police) we deliberately maintain a discreet distance. This has a number of distinct advantages:-

- We are perceived by young people as being separate from the CJS
- Young people can come to us with a “clean sheet”.
- We are able to work with young people within a community context who are offending but who haven't yet come to the notice of the CJS

2.2 Participation is Voluntary

This principle of voluntary engagement is intrinsic to the practice, and forms the shape and nature of the relationship between the youth worker and the young person. It means that young people are enabled to retain power. This process, by its very nature, has to be one of mutual negotiation involving much 'give and take'. If a programme doesn't meet the aspirations of the young person, he or she always has the power to walk away from it.

2.3 The Programme Works both on an individual level & with peer groups

Young people who attend The **X-it** Programme are seen as individuals with their own unique starting points. They are encouraged to look at, and gain confidence in, their individual and collective identities. This attitude is respected and promoted. The programme recognises the nature, power and importance of young people's peer relationships, which is a fundamental part of its success. The **X-it** Programme works with peer groups as a whole.

2.4 It is young person led

By employing, as peer workers, young people who have attended previous programmes, the programme aims to ensure that young people's voices are heard and heeded. The young people are involved in all stages of the programme, including the recruitment and delivery, which ensures parity between the workers and the young people.

2.5 It operates within a community context

We work directly on young people's territory and in partnership with local agencies. This enables us to address the local concerns of neighbourhoods and to be proactive in providing solutions. For example on The Moorlands Estate in Brixton we have created a multiple agency partnership which includes The Youth and Play Service; The YIP; PAYP, Housing Agencies; Community Safety; Hillmead Primary School and The Police.

2.6 It works in Partnership

We recognise that no one agency is able to provide all of the solutions and that a successful programme draws in the expertise of a number of agencies. Our initial target groups are identified utilising intelligence from a number of sources. These include Housing agencies; The Police; Community Safety Teams; Tenants Associations; Youth Workers and most importantly young people themselves.

Currently three agencies work in delivering key elements of the programme. These are The Lambeth Youth & Play Service, In-volve and The Brathay Hall Trust. We all have a shared philosophy and the work of each agency compliments the other.

3. THE PROGRAMME ELEMENTS

During the recruitment stage of the programme, we gather intelligence and identify 3 key “Hot Spots”. We target more than one area at a time as this has the bonus of enabling us to

address issues of territory and territorial conflict. These areas (usually estate based) are where young people's criminal activities in groups are causing serious problems. Once areas are defined we identify which young people are responsible for the problems and in particular the key players within these groups. The **X-it** team then approaches these young people, the programme is outlined to them, and they are asked if they would like to participate. Six young people are then recruited from each "Hot Spot". The Youth Peer Workers are critical at this stage as they provide role models to demonstrate what is possible and achievable.

We target young people aged between 14 and 21 years (although this is flexible). We aim to work with 22 young people (18 participants & 4 Youth Peer Workers) per programme, but are always over subscribed.

The programme runs over 32 weeks and is delivered in modules by the various partners. We maintain a consistency of workers throughout the modules, with partner agencies supplying their workers to each other's modules. These consist of:

3.1 Ten weeks of group work sessions run by The X-it Team

The **X-it** Team consists of Youth Workers and Youth Peer Workers employed by Lambeth Youth & Play Service and a local police sergeant. The group work sessions are run on each group's "home territory" and are run simultaneously. The sessions address a number of issues such as weapon carrying; the economics of crime; drug abuse; peer pressure and conflict resolution. Alongside this we also encourage young people to set simple goals and how to vision them. On Saturdays we bring the three groups together for social activities such as a football match, Go-Karting or a dinner out. This enables the young people to get to know each other. We also run a two-day residential preparation at an Outdoor Activity Centre in London with the Brathay staff.

3.2 Six -day residential at Brathay Hall – Lake District

Brathay Hall is a centre of excellence in youth development. They design innovative residential programmes for young people using powerful experiences as a backdrop for growth. Young people are encouraged to cultivate a positive sense of self and others, which allows them to flourish. This element of the programme offers participants an intensive programme of challenging activities, focussing upon the development of their confidence, competence and self-esteem. The young people are encouraged to learn through their experiences and to reflect on this learning.

3.3 Leadership Programme

In-volve run the final module. In-Volve are a social care charity that has been successfully targeting community groups affected by social exclusion for over twenty years. In-Volve's service side runs provision in many parts of the UK including the largest young person's drug service in the country. As part of the **X-it** Programme In-volve runs a 20-week leadership course called RAW. The aim of the RAW process is to increase levels of self-awareness and emotional competency, and to empower socially excluded young people towards constructive and informed decision-making. As part of the leadership programme the young people are provided with one 2 one support and life coaching.

Throughout, the **X-it** Programme workers support participants, making home visits; offering court support; advocating with various agencies on their behalf and identifying training and employment opportunities.

4. EVALUATION

John Pitts, Vauxhall Professor of Socio-legal Studies, University of Luton evaluated the **X-it** Programme. This evaluation followed the progress of 25 young people of whom 24 were of African Caribbean descent and 1 who was White. This evaluation identified that whilst the participants on the programme continued to have contact with gangs in their neighbourhoods, their gang activity was greatly reduced: -

“Overall, in as much as it is possible to tell, 18 of the 25 participants (72%) desisted from offending during their involvement with the **X-it** programme, having no new offences recorded against them. This formal data was corroborated informally by friends and acquaintances.”

J.Pitts An Evaluation of the X-it gang desistance programme, Lambeth. March 2006

The evaluation identified a number of key factors underlying The **X-it** Programme 's success. John Pitts concluded that the voluntary nature of the programme combined with an orientation towards providing opportunities is an effective approach. He also identified the programme's aim to meet the emotional needs of the young people as playing a role in enabling; “ youngsters to navigate the world without recourse to violence and coercion”. The **X-it** Programme aims to establish a “dialogue” between participants and workers. Paulo Freire (The Brazilian educationalist) believed that this is key to working with disenfranchised groups. Dialogue he insisted is a co-operative activity involving respect and involves people working with each other, rather than one person acting upon another and can be seen to develop social capital and mutual trust. This process of dialogue can develop ‘critical consciousness’, which enables people to critically examine and learn from the past, leading to informed action in the present. The Youth Peer Workers played a central role in this, providing both role models and emotional support to their peers. The need for young people to commit to making major changes in their lives in order to come onto the programme and in becoming active agents in this process was also highlighted.

“It is, of course, a social-psychological truism that the harder it is to gain access to a group, the more highly membership will be valued and, in consequence, the more highly the member will rate themselves for having achieved membership. Thus, the challenge of gaining entry to the programme, and the possibility that this might be denied, appears to be a motivating factor.”

J.Pitts An Evaluation of the X-it gang desistance programme, Lambeth. March 2006

The final factor was the positive nature of the relationships between the workers and the young people. These were grounded in existing relationships, and that the high expectations and the care and attention of the staff team was crucial;

“It opened a door for me. I wanted to get into youth work and its helped. The programme's given me a lot of insight into young people and why they do the things they do. I think their parents are too stretched with trying just to make a living – they haven't got time to care, these people, the **X-it** staff, they care, they give unconditional love, do you know what I mean?”

Participant quoted in: J.Pitts An Evaluation of the X-it gang desistance programme, Lambeth. March 2006

5. WAYS FORWARD

Ted Cantle found that a widespread feeling amongst communities is that they have little stake in their communities and don't get enough help in tackling their problems. Successful programmes directly engage the community in providing solutions. By creating partnerships between statutory and voluntary groups and by engaging local people a sense of ownership is engendered. Systems have to be created that enable local people to identify the issues, without being overwhelmed by professionals. In the **X-it** Programme we create social capital by increasing young people's networks and spheres of influence, employment and training opportunities, empowering them to become community leaders.

Young people when asked what their dreams for their future are, state very simply; "*A home; A good job; A nice partner and a couple of kids*" These surely are not unrealistic goals? But for many Black young people who are disenfranchised from the main stream, these seemingly simple goals are perceived as unattainable. The "Gang" or "Crew" offers young people a family, an identity, power, associated self-esteem, and the potential for making money. Viable options have to be given to these young people.

Black young people are more likely to suffer from a multitude of social exclusion factors than their white counterparts, and being out of school was highlighted in John Pitts' report as being a critical factor in our participant's becoming engaged in anti-social behaviour. Black young people are also more likely to suffer from a low self-esteem, created by their experience of institutionalised racism and have less access to employment. These factors also impact on their parents/carers and the communities in which they live.

The **X-it** Programme has been exploring ways of establishing a seamless process in order to provide viable progression routes for young people. Further funding and viable community partnerships have enabled us to deliver a junior **X-it** (Targeting 10-12 year olds who are using weapons and already involved on the fringes of the gang culture); a parenting programme for the parents/carers of our participants and workshops on Islam. John Pitts identifies successful projects as those that have offered;

"The possibility of being '*somebody else*'. This somebody else could be a plumber, a joiner, a hairdresser or a web-site builder, but they had a steady income a trade and they were not constantly looking over their shoulder. In short, successful projects enabled youngsters to gain access to, and survive and prosper within, the educational and vocational mainstream.

J.Pitts An Evaluation of the X-it gang desistance programme, Lambeth. March 2006

In order to address the over representation of Young Black People within the Criminal Justice system we need to create successful and effective partnerships to deliver a holistic programme that addresses young people's behavioural issues as well as their pastoral care needs, based within a community context.

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