



## KIDS COUNT ASKED TO SPEAK AT DAVID CAMERON'S CONFERENCE: "MENDING BROKEN BRITAIN"

### Mending Broken Britain?

Conference 10<sup>th</sup> April 2008  
Written by Pariss, Chair of the youth board at Kids Count

The conference encompassed two sessions, after the brief introductory remarks from David Cameron and a heart felt plea for us to abandon our 'naivety' from mother and victim, Ms Helen Newlove, followed an acknowledgment of the suggested causes of crime and anti-social behaviour and how we came to face what some might consider a 'broken society'. The first session recognised that despite the consistence and growth in youth crime for a great period of time now and promises from various politicians to 'get tough' on crime and anti-social behaviour, the problems are getting worse not better. So where are we as a society going wrong?

**Much of the blame weighed heavily upon the shoulders of our parents.**

The session aimed to question why so many young people are disrespectful to those around them, why this behaviour spills so easily over into criminal and violent acts and what role do failing

schools, breakdown in families and ineffective policing have to play in all of this.

Session one was chaired by Michael Gove MP Secretary of State for children, Schools, accompanied by the contributions of Jan Berry, chairman of the police federation and Philipa Strous, centre for social policy. With session one came the statistics, a lot of which centralised around those that commit crimes and the fact that a large percentage of those came from



what is deemed a 'broken family'; lone parent families, absent fathers etc. Questions from the floor were raised that challenged the policy of rewarding married couples to stay together,

**is it right to encourage victims of domestic violence to stay with their abusive partner?**

How do we prevent this? The panel addressed such questions with care and consideration, and argued that it is not part of their policy to force together couples that would result in harm to one another or the child, but to encourage people to consider the importance of their families and the stability that results from such unity.

During this session it was clear to see that statistics were being used to emphasise the importance of a stable family in the outcome of a child's attitude and behaviour, and this was fairly justified. However, it seemed a very one sided argument in which a conservative policy was being pushed to the point that important factors were being ignored. Jan Berry gave an officers professional perspective on the issue and stated that

**there were over one hundred possible solutions or incentives that could be carried out-**

this would be a great place to start to tackle the problem.

The second session in which Mr Cameron sadly missed, was aimed to look at possible solutions to the developing problem. Chaired by Edward Garnier, MP Shadow Justice minister, the session began with two youth

perspectives from Kids Count. I spoke first of the importance of Kids Count to both young people and adults as it breaks down those social barriers that so many people attempt to ignore, I highlighted the fact that

**at a conference aimed at piecing together solutions to a growing problem of youth crime there were very few young faces in the audience**

(with no offence intended) and I was grateful to be there and to have been given a voice through such an amazing organisation. I spoke of my experience of domestic violence in reaction to the first session, I wanted to highlight the fact that over a period of seven years, and being recorded by the police on countless occasions for call outs, that nothing was actually done to prevent this reoccurring violence. I expressed my anger and my pain at the fact that any respect for my mother was lost at that moment as I found it hard to respect someone who had lost so much respect for themselves, the moment she made a stand was the proudest of my life. I wanted to highlight this fact in support of the view that the family is important to the behaviour and mental state of a child, however I'm living proof that a lot of crime comes down to personal choice,

This point followed on to the influence and importance of schools. Shaun Bailey, youth worker and Conservative candidate for Hammersmith, disagreed with me when I said that schools played a vital role in the upbringing of its children, young people spend five days out of seven at school, this is where they meet their friendship circles and are influenced by the behaviour of their peers. Surely this is an environment that tests the patience and self will of a young person and could be the tipping point in which a child begins to interact with 'the wrong crowd'. School can be extremely frustrating for youths as there seems to be more of a focus on achieving minimum target grades rather than focusing on the abilities of the child that may venture further than a C grade at the end of the academic year.

**When a young person feels ignored they will gain attention in a way they know how,**

and they can see this through the actions of their peers, those that disrupt lessons and cause what can only be described as mayhem are those that are given time and thought. This is then just the starting point of a young persons turn for the worst, aggressive behaviour results in exclusions and exclusions result in young people finding themselves bored, on the streets and angry.

**as much as we can blame the family for societies problems it is hard to ignore the fact that its perpetrators don't always root from broken homes.**

Another point that I ventured to make was the fact that

**by announcing that Britain Is 'broken' is a defeatist attitude that gives little hope of being fixed.**



There are countries much worse off than we are in terms of crime and poverty and therefore it seemed a bit dramatic to argue that we are broken, if we were to follow that analogy then it would have been far more fitting to argue that Britain is bruised to which I got a mixed reaction of support and criticism, all fairly justified.

Maxwell, another valued member of Kids Count, spoke next of his encounters and involvement in youth crime. His honesty and positive attitude was both admirable and moving, and I think this belief was reflected in his audience. He spoke of the lack of deterrence and rehabilitation



in prison, in which he received many vigorous nods and laughter from both the panel and the audience, he argued that in order to make a positive change

**we need to be firm in our criminal justice system,**

there is too much leeway for criminals to re offend and longer fixed sentences may be the answer to this problem, a suggestion widely supported in recent times. He also queried the mobility of arms in recent years, we

need to recognise that guns are being imported and sold to young people by adults, so does it not make sense to trace where these guns are coming from? It may not solve the problem of violence, but it would mean one less weapon on the street.

Shaun Bailey and Paul Oginsky, advisor to the National Citizen Service, spoke confidently of the importance of the family, Mr Bailey argued that schools have too much responsibility thrust upon them and not enough is put upon the family. He supported this view with the fact that as parents it is their job to teach their children the meaning of good and bad and instil morals and conscience from a young age. He also argued that Britain is in fact broken as never have we experienced such a decline in respect for one another and our parents, and that is a frightening thought. Paul Oginsky picked up on this point of respect and made reference to my speech earlier and supported the statement that respect is lost for a person when that person loses respect for themselves.

In considering the aim of the conference as a whole it is difficult to say that a lot of progress was made. It was extremely encouraging to hear from David Cameron that youth crime is on the agenda and will be tackled across party lines as this gives us confidence that in the near future positive change may be made, but I feel as yet

**the conference was unable to stray from party politics**

in the fact that some panel members found it extremely difficult to engulf the idea that there could be more than one factor effecting youth aggression and violence,

**and as Ms Newlove so rightly put it, we need not be 'naive' when facing such a growing problem**

and we need to be honest with ourselves and be willing to take on suggestion and new ideas, as the conference as a whole was unable to think past that of the family.



We would like to thank the Conservative party for giving Maxwell and I the opportunity to speak and be involved in the conference and to the many of you, who e-mail and spoke to us after the conference with your warm words of support.

**Kids Count will carry on it's campaign to keep young people at the heart of policy and the family!**