



KIDS COUNT VISIT PARTY CONFERENCES 2007

GANGSTERS' PARADISE?

Last years conferences proved a big hit for Kids Count, the fringes held addressed the issues of gang crime; the session being called 'Gangsters' paradise?'

It was a great experience for us all, not only did we learn from those at the conferences, we also got to get to know our team members, which I personally valued most.

Here are the accounts from some of the youth board members at kids Count...



Conservative Conference 2007

Written by Pariss

Chairman of the Youth Board

The conservative conference was held in Blackpool this year and saw a great turnout. After attending both the Liberal Democrat and Labour conferences, Kids Count had developed a much more confident and professional approach to the conference as a whole and to the MP's we met.

The solutions to gangs and weapons fringe was held on Tuesday 2nd October in the winter gardens. The key speakers on this occasion were; James Brokenshire MP, shadow minister for home affairs, Richard Taylor from the Damilola Taylor Trust, Mike Jervis from 'Defending Da Hood', Salima Hafejee, a board member of the Youth Justice Board, Steve Tyler from 'Operation Trident' and Lhamea Lall, our very own youth board member at Kids Count.

Each speaker had a strong and valid argument to put forward, and offered a different contribution from each field of work. James Brokenshire was able to shine a light on the current issue of the ever increasing youth violence of today, he put to the table various reasons why such atrocities occur and possible solutions. He was a brilliant speaker that instilled the importance of collective support to tackle the problem.

Richard Taylor, from the Damilola Taylor Trust, put aside the heart breaking death of his young son Damilola and highlighted his belief that the real issue now lies in the increasing violence that youths fall victim to, or take part in. He argued that instead of mourning for the loss of his son, we should work towards understanding the many reasons for such violent acts and take the opportunity to speak out.

Mike Jervis, from Defending Da Hood, told his amazingly brave stories of how he brought together some of the most notorious gangs and attempted to reconcile their

differences, he argued that collectively it is important that we speak out and defend ourselves and youths, from such violence we should not tolerate, he argued that we are giving their gangs status and power by showing fear and hiding away from the problem.

"Collectively it is important that we speak out and defend ourselves and youths"

Salima Hafejee spoke confidently about the problems of youth crime as a member of the Youth Justice Board, she talked about the communities that were effected by crime and how as a group they could counter act such problems. It seemed a general consensus that we as a community should stand together in stamping out youth crime, it is understood that there is not real short term solution, however, a big step in itself is admitting that violence should and will not be tolerated.

"we as a community should stand to-

gether”

This links in well with Steve Tyler's contribution, as a member of Operation Trident he highlighted that over the last year young people have finally been able to serve a sentence for their crime, and hopefully this will set a precedence for future occurrences. He highlighted the fact that a majority of those that fall victim to crime is the black community, and that the lack of positive black male role models is key in this spiralling downfall, as it is important to have a realistic goal and someone to relate to.

Lhamea Lall, a member of the youth board at Kids Count talked of her experiences with bullying, the struggles she strived to overcome, how she had to change schools and speak out against death threats that the police were unable to follow up. She is an example of a strong, independent and successful young person who was able to overcome such struggles and develop herself as a person and channel her hurt and anger into something productive. She strives to inspire young people to use their feelings in a productive way, for examples, the arts, just as she did.

The fringe triggered a great deal of interest and enthusiasm, the speakers were faced with many questions asking how communities can speak out, how youths that commit these crimes are punished, how should they be punished and should those that are not directly effected by youth crime be overlooked.

I think Kids count achieved it goal with the solutions to Gangs and Weapons fringe, in that we were able to communicate with those that believed that youth crime is a fundamental problem at present that needs to be directly addressed, it raised awareness of the struggles that youths face, with the help of a short film named 'Street Critique' by where the board went out onto the streets and attempted to find the root of the problem. The reaction to the film was an emotional one for some, some near to tears, and some angered



further by the violence that we as a community have seemed to tolerate, up until now.

The conference was a great experience, and I believe that we are that much closer to getting to the root of the problem and changing it, with the help of some very dedicated people. The speakers contributed a great deal and we are grateful for their hard work and their dedication, and also proud of the hard work that the Kids Count members put in. It paid off.



The think tank, on the problems that youths face today, Kids Count have been attending the party conferences that the three main parties have been holding over the past few weeks. Americo and myself have had the fantastic opportunity of joining the Kids Count youth board and having the chance to go on the conference to promote our cause.

We had to try and get as many politicians as we could to our fringe as possible, eventually after two day of promoting we managed to have a full house at our fringe meeting, along farther, Lhamea, valued member of the youth board, who some of you may remember from the Anti Knife Crime event we held last year, the head of Operation Trident; resolving gun crime in London and an array of amazing youth workers. MP Vernon Coaker gave an emotional talk and made everyone including the Kids Count team realise that the

government know the reality of the hard hitting problem we face:

“But in saying we do have a problem with our youth, we have to realise that the majority of our teens are fantastic individuals, but they have to deal with growing up in hard times”

We saw Mike Jervis a youth worker from east, making a phenomenal difference in his area. Mike ran a project in his area that was huge, he had every big gang in the east end come together at one place and talk about their issues, and this was an impressive achievement. He also set up a group called 'mothers together' who sat down once a week and talked about what their sons and even daughters were doing, be it dealing drugs, armed robbery etc. They help each other help their kids. He really inspired the audience and us; his message was that if we have everyone in our community come together then we can make a difference.

Labour Conference 2007

Written by Jinal and Americo, valued members of the kids Count youth board

“We can roll up to any gang or gang member and tell them that their days committing youth crime are over, if we work as a community, trust me on this”

Overall the past few days have been exciting, being in the heart of the most powerful political party at this present day. We had the chance to talk to a lot of MP's and a fair bit of media from The Sun news paper to ITV news as well, we all tried to get our point across and hopefully trigger some awareness and change the governments point of view and other teens as well. We had a really good time and got to meet a bunch of new people. As well as arising the issue that our youth face today.

Liberal Democrat Conference 2007

Written by Tinashe,

valued member of Kids Count youth board

A bitterly cold winter-sque morning awaited us in Brighton as we embarked on our journey to affect change. Are we there yet I felt like yelling out so feverishly. While I was somewhat knowledgeable about the working of the UK political system i had never been at the business end of it nor did i ever think I'd get to influence debate in such a profound way... or so I naively envisaged. So buoyed with enthusiasm, it's almost as if my mood had serendipitously impregnated the rest of the group. However that zeal soon waned the liberal democrat delegates and members rejected the fliers for our fringe meeting one after the other.

While some were genuinely intrigued by our cause the majority weren't so inclined to tear themselves away from their busy schedules. So what was to become of our once keening anticipated fringe meeting? As i began to wonder, sombrely, gradually becoming irritated, i felt like screaming out "don't you care about tomorrows MP's, QC's, neurologists, Architects and investment bankers". When it hit me, almost like an epiphany... it is not but a harsh reality that these atrocities will always predominately torment the black community that forgive me for being crass have been time and again pigeon-holed underachievers? Put aside rhetoric of political correctness and the facts speak for

themselves. For the rest of the day i couldn't seem to shake that thought, even more so as it appeared delegates and members alike we only take our fliers just out of benevolence. The evening did end on a good note however as the group all merrily gathered around to tuck into what was a scrumptious meal. Despite the events of the day the group still seemed markedly enthusiastic or maybe because the thought of a warm bed loomed. As i turned off the light I lay awake pondering on a few inconvenient truths...

Just how many lives would a gun have to claim for kids to really count?

Not to overstate matters but the next day really did feel like a wintery morning in Scotland. By then we'd handed out so many fliers that everyman and his dog had heard of 'kids count' and I'd hoped this would equate to a high turnout for our meeting. Surprisingly I wasn't disappointed. The room could have been filled twice over not to mention how it could have lasted at least another 30 minutes such were the levels of interest. It really did surpass all expectations, evoking heart-



ening sentiments from the audience. So much so that a lady was quoted by a BBC reporter as saying

"this has been the best fringe meeting of the conference".

.. And no it wasn't our very own Linda. If I wasn't already, I found myself proud to be a part of our barmy little group. Are we there yet? ... No.

The truth of the matter is that we lack the political clout to directly address the ills that plagues today's society. But will we stop trying... no, because this is a multifaceted problem that requires all-government, schools and parents- of society to pull together and in each of us lies the determination of a hungry rock wilder and the passion to bring about change.



SOME OF THE MEMBERS OF KIDS COUNT YOUTH BOARD
L-R: Amanda, Lhamea, Natalie, Americo, Pariss, Jinal, Clark, Teshna & Tishe