

The Conservative Conference 2007

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 chair 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.

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.



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, youth board chair 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.

Pariss