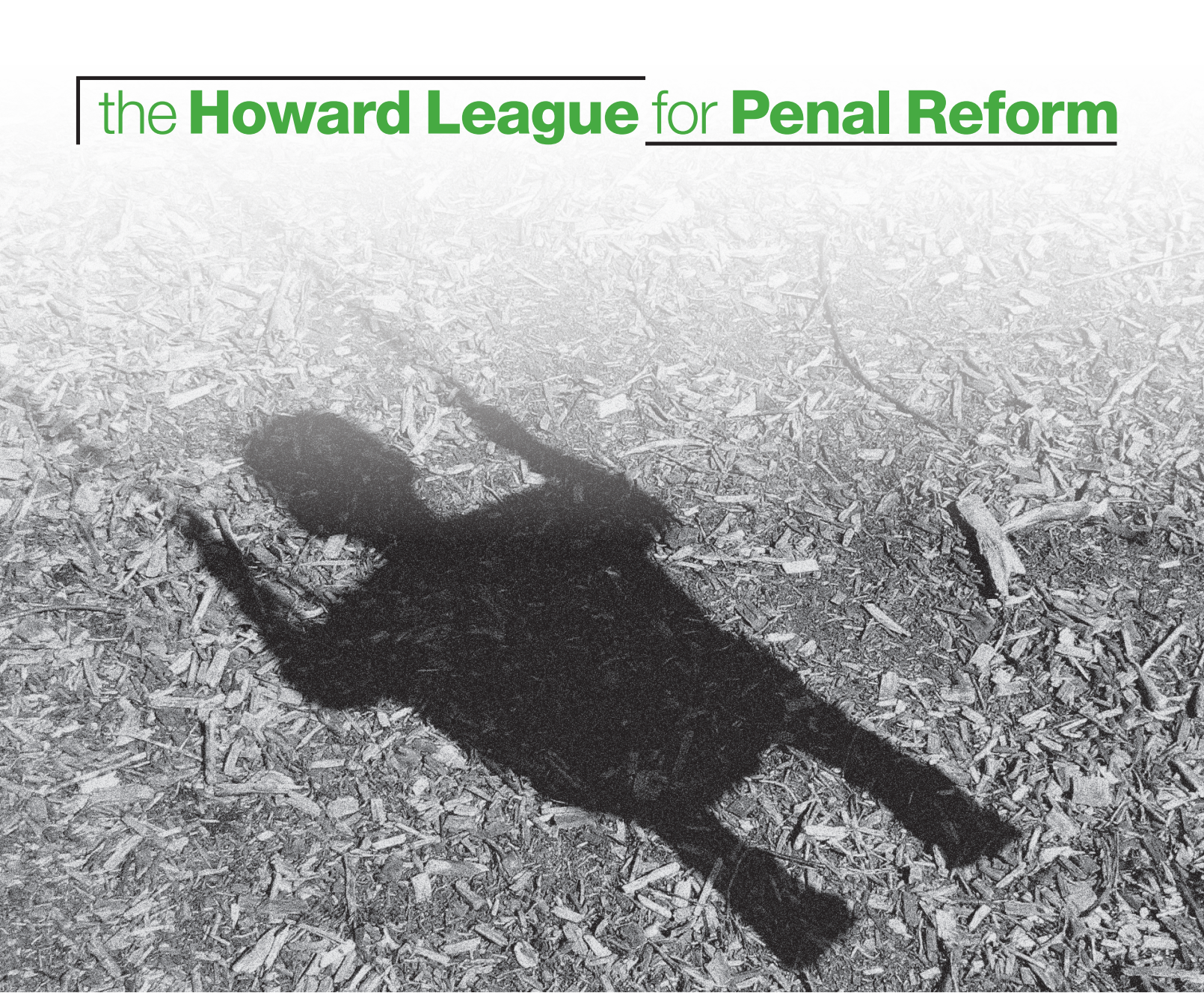


the **Howard League** for **Penal Reform**



Children as Victims

Child-sized Crimes in a
Child-sized World



Children as Victims

Child-sized Crimes in a Child-sized World

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1. Foreword

Public attitudes to children and crime have never been less sympathetic and more punitive. Our country's young, who should be nurtured and, crucially, allowed to make mistakes as they grow up, increasingly find themselves criminalised by anti-social behaviour legislation and ever-tougher sentencing. But rather than find out the roots of their anti-social behaviour and tackle them directly, the government has, all too often, reached for knee-jerk legislation of punishment and supposed deterrence, over the more considered approach that such complex and serious issues deserve.

Tackling the issues of children and crime requires a reboot of government thinking and a willingness to put real commitment behind new ideas. The first step is strikingly simple, but one we have lost sight of – in a country where, in comparison to the United Nations recommended age range of 14–16 years, children are considered fully culpable for criminal offences at the age of just 10 years.

That first step is to recognise that all children are children first and foremost. Children who commit crimes do not lose their child status overnight, although by treating them as unsympathetic, quasi-adults we ensure that their childhood begins to warp and derail. The results are never pretty, as the higher-than-average re-conviction rates for children who leave custody demonstrate, with 68.6% reconvicted within one year – rising to 82% for boys aged 15–18 years, and a staggering 96% for those with more than seven convictions.

A second step is to recognise that a significant experience in many children's lives is one of victimisation, in some form or other. This report is about children's experiences as victims of crime. The majority of incidents of victimisation in this report are low-level crimes taking place in schools and playgrounds. To children however, in a child-sized world, these crimes are serious enough – they matter. At the same time, these incidents simply highlight children behaving like children, where the issues need to be addressed as a problem rather than criminalised (Allen 2006). The government approach in recent years has also been to force change in children's behaviour from the top down through law enforcement and the use of custody.

But children are, by definition, immature. Those children who are likely to commit crimes are arguably the most immature of all. They do not always understand consequences and fear the immediate threat of violence and ridicule among their peers far more than the distant threat of court sentencing and custody. The levels of victimisation represented in this report predominantly occur in school, in the playground, and are child-on-child. The highest reported victimisation was assault and its effects cannot be ignored. As Karstedt argues, there are crimes, which occur as part of everyday life and are not regarded directly as 'anti-social' but seen as 'anti-civil' (Karstedt and Farrall 2007). Ironically, the very institutions where children should feel safest – their school environments set up and patrolled by adults – are where children are most commonly victimised. In contrast, incidents of victimisation are lowest in public, on the streets, and on the way to and from school, where adult patrol is reduced.

Although the incidents reported in the survey need to be taken seriously, they also need to be kept in context. The incidents do have an impact on the lives of children, but they are occurring between children. The reactions of children themselves are quite dismissive, and taking a strong punitive view when reacting to these actions would not be an appropriate response. Adults, as shown in this survey, do not fully understand how to respond to these incidents between children, and tend to take little action. The danger here is that adults become concerned only when the incidents become more serious, or break out from being child-on-child to child-on-adult. Coming at the problem once the proverbial horses have bolted helps nobody. What is needed is a better way of encouraging change, enabling adults to understand the issues, and work with children towards more positive outcomes.

The Howard League for Penal Reform believes that better solutions on dealing with child victimisation and crime can be found in expanding and developing conflict resolution and mediation-based techniques into educational programmes for schools. This will help shift the issue of problematic behaviour from punishment to problem solving. These techniques will also help with listening to children talk about their own experiences as victims, help children listen to other children, and ultimately, help all involved to resolve conflicts peacefully by making informed choices about their own actions and rejecting harmful behaviour to themselves and others.

Children are the future, we often hear – which, in a sense, means that children are not the present. We should not judge them by our own standards, because those standards simply do not apply – children would not be children otherwise. Our young people, particularly those in trouble with the law, need time to develop, and all the help that we can give them. If we do not start recognising this, then society will pay the price with more crime, more re-offending, more victims, more suffering.

Frances Crook
Director, the Howard League for Penal Reform

2. Recommendations:

- **Tackling the issues of children and crime requires a reboot of government thinking and a willingness to put real commitment behind new ideas**

As opposed to an emphasis on a top down approach of law enforcement and use of custody, the Howard League for Penal Reform proposes a bottom up local partnership approach, based in schools, emphasising education. The Citizenship and Crime project worked with strong local partnerships for ten years, which included local education authorities, police, victim support, the local community safety and youth offending teams, key community groups and others, when working on the issues of crime and citizenship. With that kind of backing, projects could work with schools across the country in high-risk areas, to educate children about crime and victimisation, using presentations and workshops to inform them of the criminal justice system, and challenging attitudes to offending and anti-social behaviour

- **Many techniques of conflict resolution and trained mediation used in restorative justice could be used in educational programmes, working with children**

These methods are appropriate ways of dealing with children who are being 'anti-civil' or who are making mistakes. This would go hand-in-hand with listening to children talk about their own experiences as victims – helping them to develop social skills, self-esteem and assertiveness, and showing them how to resolve conflicts peacefully by making informed choices about their own actions, and rejecting behaviour harmful to themselves and others. These methods could be used to focus on key points in children's development, such as the transition from primary to secondary school in Year 7. In this way, we believe schools would benefit from less conflict and far more positive communication – which, in turn, will reduce the risk of crime and victimisation occurring

- **Using restorative approaches will provide schools with methods and scope to respond more appropriately to many incidents in schools**

Restorative justice methods are not a panacea for problems in schools but, if implemented correctly, they can improve the school environment, enhance learning, and encourage young people to become more responsible and empathetic (Youth Justice Board 2004)

- **Expanding and developing conflict resolution and mediation-based techniques into educational programmes will help shift the issue of problematic behaviour from punishment into problem solving**
- **Children need to be listened to and included in all future proposals and policies affecting their lives**

If the new government strategy on engaging young people and vulnerable groups is to be effective, it needs to ensure that it is talking with, listening to and engaging all children, to guarantee that the correct services are being provided for them (HM Treasury 2007)

3. Introduction

Children are rarely consulted about the impact of crime on their lives. If they were, adults would discover that children are frequently the victims of crime perpetrated by other young people. The Howard League for Penal Reform's surveys revealed that these crimes are often not reported, as children think adults will not listen to them or the crime will be viewed as too small to bother with. Children had clear views about what should be done about such crimes and their attitudes and ideas on crime and crime prevention need to be addressed and listened to; children's views need to be included in the solutions, the policies, the practices and services to help prevent crime and victimisation.

As part of our Citizenship and Crime project (outlined below), the Howard League for Penal Reform surveyed over 3,000 children in schools over a period of seven years. Of these, 95% of children aged 10–15 years reported being a victim of crime.

The Howard League for Penal Reform's consultation process helped community safety teams and youth offending teams to consult with young people to develop their crime-prevention strategies. Adults in their local communities were already consulted, but children were being ignored. Consulting children in this way is rare or sporadic. Barnardo's (2007) recently suggested that never have children been so widely dismissed, with the current generation of children being written off by adults instead of supported and trusted.

The Howard League for Penal Reform's child victimisation and crime prevention surveys have helped to fill this void. We gave children a voice in the developments and future decisions of their local communities by carrying out this consultation process. We designed surveys to explore the attitudes of young people on crime, crime prevention and victimisation. The first consultation was written for, and on behalf of, London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Youth Offending Team, which was included in the team's crime strategy.

4. Background

The Howard League for Penal Reform's Citizenship and Crime project worked in primary and secondary schools nationally between 1997 and 2006, working with over 22,000 children between the ages of 10 and 16 years. The Citizenship and Crime project ran 243 conferences in 186 schools and pupil referral units, and recruited and trained over 2,000 volunteers. Volunteers included members of the police, youth offending teams, community safety teams, victim support, youth service, probation service, prison service, magistrates, lawyers and students.

The conferences were organised to help young people discuss the issues of crime and citizenship in a way that was relevant and meaningful to them. The Howard League for Penal Reform's challenging one- and two-day programmes used highly structured workshops to explore the issues. These workshops helped young people to explore the consequences of crime and give them strategies for avoiding trouble through drama, quizzes, role-plays and games. Workshops focused on:

- the consequences of crime
- how it feels to be a victim of crime
- how youth courts and sentencing work
- discussing strategies for avoiding crime
- exploring their own rights and responsibilities; and
- thinking about positive action to improve their communities

The conferences were used to help children explore alternative views and arguments about crime and its consequences. We aimed to raise children's awareness of the issue of crime but also provide alternatives to the traditional views and representations of crime in wider society

At the end of each conference, all students completed a questionnaire, giving them the opportunity to provide their views, experiences and attitudes towards crime and crime prevention. The conferences gave young people the space and confidence to talk about crime, crime prevention and victimisation. The surveys were completed by students individually and not as a group. They were also anonymous. Project volunteers were present to help students with any difficulties encountered when completing the survey, for example, not understanding a particular word or question, or if a student spoke English as a second language.

5. Youth Crime Survey

The Howard League for Penal Reform surveyed 3,023 children over a seven-year period between 2000 and 2006, in primary and secondary schools nationally. Children aged 10–15 years were surveyed in schools hosting a conference in the following regions:

- London Borough of Enfield
- London Borough of Southwark
- London Borough of Camden
- Leeds
- Northamptonshire

The Howard League for Penal Reform questioned 1,905 children in primary schools¹ between the ages of 10 and 11 years, and 1,118 children in secondary schools² between the ages of 12 and 15 years. Nearly twice as many children took part in this consultation in primary schools as in the secondary schools, because organisations wanted to have an input and an influence on the transitional experiences of children from primary to secondary school. Organisations such as the Children Fund and youth offending teams wanted to put into place early intervention strategies, to engage with 10 to 11-year-olds to help raise their self-esteem and confidence, at a time when children could feel vulnerable and isolated as they moved to new and bigger schools.

¹ The Howard League for Penal Reform worked in partnership with the Children Fund in Camden and Northamptonshire and Enfield Youth Offending Team.

² The Howard League for Penal Reform worked in partnership with Southwark Community Safety Team and the Children Fund Leeds.

6. Key Findings

- 95% of children surveyed had been a victim of crime on at least one occasion
- Many children had been victims of theft: 49% had property stolen from them at school, and 18% between school and home
- 57% had property deliberately damaged
- A majority of children had experienced bullying or assaults, with 46% stating they had been called racist names, and 56% threatened on at least one occasion. Nearly three-quarters of children in this survey had been assaulted
- Children predominantly reported their victimisation to family members and friends. Only a third reported incidents to the police or teachers
- Children had a fear of crime and wanted safe places to play. They told us they felt vulnerable and scared. They felt adults demonised them as the perpetrators of crime when they should be viewed as the victims of crime
- Children had very clear ideas on crime prevention. Their ideas included examples of more local activities, for example: building more child friendly cafes; skate parks; and youth clubs, to keep children busy
- Children demonstrated to us that they had a clear idea of justice and fairness. They had views about acceptable standards of behaviour, with the problematic behaviour, seen as 'anti-social' by some, being regarded as 'anti-civil behaviour' in young people's eyes, and thus being accepted as part of their growing up process and something they have to deal with on a daily basis
- The majority of incidents of victimisation in this report were low-level crimes taking place in schools and playgrounds

7. Personal Victimisation

The British Crime Survey (BCS) (Home Office 2007) shows that crime in England and Wales increased between 1981 and 1995, before falling sharply and then stabilising.³ There has been an overall fall of 42% since 1995, and the risk of becoming a victim of crime has fallen from 40% at its peak in 1995, to 24% in 2006/7 (Home Office 2007). The Crime and Justice Survey undertaken in 2003 surveyed children aged 10–15 years. It found that 35% had experienced at least one personal crime in the previous year (Home Office 2005). These crimes included assault, robbery, theft from the person and theft of personal property. Results from the Howard League for Penal Reform surveys found much higher experiences of victimisation. Ninety-five per cent of children reported being a victim of crime on at least one occasion in the 12 months prior to the survey.

Table 1 shows the experiences of young people as victims of crime. The table shows the percentage of children affected by a crime on more than one occasion.

Table 1. Self-reported Child Victimisation

Crimes children have been affected by	% affected
Someone has hit or kicked me	72
Property has been deliberately damaged or broken	57
Someone has threatened to hurt me	56
I have had something stolen	49
I have been called racist names	46
My home has been broken into	19
I have had something stolen from outside school	18
Someone has taken money from me by force	11
Someone has stolen my mobile phone	9

³ This survey does not include the views of children under the age of 16 years.

Children as Victims of Property Offences

- Just under half (49%) of young people had been a victim of theft at school
- 18% of young people had experienced a theft outside the school boundaries
- 57% of young people stated they had their property deliberately damaged
- 9% of young people had a mobile phone stolen
- 11% stated they had money taken from them by force
- 19% had their home burgled

BCS results show that property crime accounted for more than three-quarters of crimes – 78% (Home Office 2007). Property crimes accounted for over 90% of reported crimes against children in the Howard League for Penal Reform survey.

Verbal Threats and Assaults

- 46% of young people had been called names because of their race or religion
- Over half of young people (56%) stated they had been physically and/or verbally threatened
- 72% of young people had actually been assaulted

The Crime and Justice Survey found a smaller proportion of children suffering verbal threats and assault than did the Howard League for Penal Reform survey (Home Office 2005). The Crime and Justice Survey found that among children aged 10–15 years, 12% had experienced threats, while 22% had been bullied. Experiences of assaults on children were a third lower in the Crime and Justice Survey compared to the Howard League for Penal Reform survey at 26%, where assault with injury was 11%, and assault with no injury was 15%. Verbal offensive and face-to-face abuse figures were very similar to the experiences of children in the Howard League for Penal Reform survey at 52% (Home Office 2005).

The Locality of Crime

- Just under a quarter (24%) of young people were victimised in or near their home
- 15% of young people had been a victim of crime on their way to and from school
- 35% of young people had been a victimised at school

8. Reporting of Crime by Children

The Howard League for Penal Reform asked children to say to whom they felt able to report their victimisation. Reporting was predominantly to people they knew well and felt safe talking to, for example, family members and friends. Our research showed that:

- 66% reported to mum or dad
- 25% reported to another family member
- 27% reported to a teacher
- 31% reported to a friend
- 28% reported to the police
- 6% reported to another adult; and
- 7% reported to an agency, e.g., telephone helpline, victim support

What Children Wanted to Happen

As part of the Howard League for Penal Reform's survey, children were asked about the outcomes they would like to see if or when they reported a crime.

Incidents of Theft

The majority of children had experienced incidents of theft. Afterwards, most had either told their teacher or a friend. They wanted to get their property returned, or for the person to whom they reported their crime to retrieve the property on their behalf.

Some children reported they wanted their teacher to '*warn the person to not do it again*' or '*to search people and get my money*'. Some children stated that they preferred to report the incident to family members rather than to the school itself. They looked to family members for support and guidance on what actions to take to get their property back. For example, one respondent stated that they reported their victimisation to their mother so that she would '*know what to do next*'. Another child wanted their mother to '*go to school to sort it out*'.

Bullying

A significant proportion of children experienced bullying and/or racism. Most of the children confided in and reported these incidents to a family member or a friend. They wanted to share with their family what had happened, as they had no real expectation that they could solve the problem. One girl told us she just wanted her friend to console her, while another child told us he wanted '*Nothing much, I just wanted them to listen to what I had to say*'. Children see their friends as an important source of support, someone they can rely on and talk to in moments of crisis (The Children's Society 2007).

Some children did tell their teachers and there seemed to be a great expectation that their teachers should act on the information. For example, they told us they wanted the teachers '*to make them [bullies] stop*' and '*to tell them off and not to do it again*'.

Assault

There was a distinct division in the expectations of students who had been victims of assault. One group was keen for the perpetrators to be talked to, and then to understand the reasons why they had been assaulted, while the other group was more interested in retaliation.

One child told us they wanted someone to *'confront him and ask him why he had done it'*. Another said that they had told their teacher about the incidents so she could *'prevent others from getting hurt'* and to *'try and make sure this won't happen again'*.

Others reported incidents to their parents so that they could *'...protect me and make me safe, like taking me to school and taking me home'*.

Some children used the reporting of incidents to friends, family members or teachers as means of retaliation. For example one child reported an assault to a teacher to *'get them [the perpetrator] into trouble'*. Similarly others reported incidents to friends or family to *'get revenge for me and get back at them'*.

Outcomes of Reporting a Crime

Children were also asked what happened after they had reported their victimisation. In cases where children wanted their property returned, the outcomes were mixed. Some told us that property had been returned with the intervention of either the police or a teacher. In other cases, a child was suspended from school. However in a majority of cases, nothing happened at all.

In some cases where bullying was involved, one child told us that *'it stopped for a while, then carried on'* while another said her teacher *'told me to go to my class and forget about it'*. Many children, therefore, believed that not enough was being done to address their issues and reporting was, therefore, futile.

Reporting Crime to the Police

Respondents were asked to give an indication of whether they would consider reporting a crime to the police. The majority (63%) thought they would report the crime to the police.

However 37% said they would not, and the reasons provided included⁴:

- 61% thought that crime might be too small to bother about
- 34% thought the police wouldn't listen to them
- 29% thought that police wouldn't be able to do anything about it
- 29% did not know how to report a crime

⁴ Multiple responses were allowed.

9. Talking to Adults About the Effects of Crime

Children were asked to give their views on crime and how they felt it affected them. Respondents commented on the fear of crime and feeling threatened, which reflects their actual experience of crime, as figures showed that 56% had been threatened in the past and 72% had been assaulted. A range of views were expressed by children including:

'A lot of young people get bullied but are scared of reporting it because they get threatened.'

'Crime can affect children by making them live in fear.'

Others talked of their fear of going to places because of crime. One child asked us *'to tell them [adults] how scared I am to come to school on my own.'* While another told us *'I would say how scared I am going home, I feel someone would grab me and take my money'.*

Other children commented on their general feelings of vulnerability:

'It [crime] makes you feel sad and insecure. You never feel safe on your own and feel threatened by minor things like seeing a group of boys.'

'It can mentally scar you, affect your school work and sometimes emotionally hurt and the adults don't see these things.'

Our questionnaires showed how much children worry about becoming a victim of crime. Children felt that they were more vulnerable than adults, and therefore needed more protection. Interestingly, children felt that adults, instead of feeling protective towards children, merely viewed children as the perpetrators of crime. Children stated that they are viewed in a negative manner by adults rather than being seen as possible victims (Young People Now 2004). Children felt stereotyped by adults:

'I think more and more people are being stereotyped to be trouble makers because a crime has been committed in their area and the young person looks like he could've done it.'

Children told us the message they wanted to get across to adults. A selection of their views reveal that children want to be part of their community and want adults to be more sensitive to their views and actively get their input:

'Just to say that we have different views on crime, we re more sensitive and you should listen to us.'

'I'd say give [children] a chance to explain because it is very hard.'

'I'd say you need to talk and help children more. I know you re trying to but make every child involved in these discussions.'

'Young people are part of the community and both adults and young people should be listened to.'

'They should pay more attention to us young people.'

Despite this desire for adults to pay more serious attention to them, many were less optimistic about the reality. They felt there was no point talking to adults anyway, even if given the opportunity, as they never listen to what young people have to say. An often-cited example related to reporting bullying at school. Children felt that telling a teacher was fruitless as: *'When you are bullied at school and you tell a teacher about it, the teacher does nothing about it. What is the point?'*

10. Preventing Crime

A clear message to emerge from our surveys was that children do have very comprehensive ideas about crime and crime prevention. The majority of children in this survey drew a direct link between children committing crimes and a lack of facilities and having nowhere to go. Children highlighted that they felt there were few safe spaces for them to play and act like children. This could be the result of adults anxiety on letting children act like children and be given freedom to play. Children need their own places and spaces in which they can pursue their own agendas, play and social interaction (The Children's Society 2007; HM Treasury 2007). They said they would like more youth clubs, safer play areas and children's Internet cafes:

'Having more youth clubs or outdoor activities to keep us occupied or having a place where we can go and talk to friends without getting into trouble.'

'Give children their own private places where they can hang out and do their homework and just chill and eat there.'

Children noted that school holidays were particularly difficult times for them. They wanted more to do, and support in filling up all the spare time. They wanted: *'places where children can go when they are bored and nothing to do in summer and more clubs and skate parks especially in the holidays'*.

Children stressed that they often had little money and that many of the activities that are available were expensive. While the Howard League for Penal Reform does not endorse this view, some children suggested that they should be able to work at a younger age so that they had pocket money. They recognised that having some sort of job would also give them something to do that would relieve boredom, as well as enabling them to pay for other activities. This response shows that children do not just expect to get something for nothing or to have parents finance everything. They told us:

'We should be able to get part-time jobs and be able to pay for stuff.'

'Make jobs after school so they could spend more time in jobs instead of the streets causing crimes.'

'Have more jobs for young people to do with better opportunities.'

'Let teenagers at 13 get an after-school job and Saturday job, learn and be busy.'

After-school or Saturday jobs were also seen as a way to gain more skills. Some children suggested providing vocational opportunities at school to increase their future prospects. It also shows that children do want to take responsibility for themselves.

As part of its work in schools, the Howard League for Penal Reform discussed various crime prevention strategies and their effectiveness. Despite evidence of low detection rates, children still looked towards the comfort in increased police presence on the streets. They also felt that police should play a greater educative role with children in schools. Children also thought that local authorities should be more involved in crime prevention education.

'Have meetings with police at school to talk about the effects of crime and how it changes people's lives.'

'I think councils should make lots of after-school classes, e.g., education, health, games etc. to avoid people doing bad things.'

11. Helping Victims of Crime

Children also thought about what they would like to be available for children who were victims of crime. One suggestion was to introduce victim support centres or drop-in centres specifically aimed at children. Children thought that they would like counselling to be available. They thought about having *'places where victims can meet and talk to each other and discuss things and do fun things'*.

Children also wanted places to go to *forget* that they had been victims of crime; where they could take part in other activities and have some fun. They thought these places could help them in: *'...deciding who their mates are. Being careful who they hang out with. Encourage them, they have their whole future ahead and don't muck it up'*. Children's centres could be developed to meet the needs of children, away from school and family, providing a safe environment to keep children occupied and where they can have fun.

The questionnaires showed that some children thought extra efforts should be made to help victims of crime to enhance their personal safety. Some of their ideas included:

'To show people how to protect themselves by providing defence classes for free.'

'Put security systems in your home or do anything to help stop the crime.'

'They could have peer counsellors; they could have learning mentors in school.'

Some respondents decided on more practical measures and to deal with the situation themselves. They thought that they should limit the valuable items they carried around like mobile phones or they should stay in groups for safety.

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the Howard League for Penal Reform

Membership Form

The Howard League for Penal Reform needs you as a member

- By becoming a member you will be making a statement - that some of the most desperate and vulnerable people in our community really do matter.
- You will send out a message that such people do have a future, no matter who they are or what they have done.
- You will be actively contributing to the Howard League's campaigns on critical issues of public concern
- You will enable us to research innovative alternative solutions to imprisonment, while remaining entirely independent of government funding and influence.

We need your support

(Tick membership required, please give more if you can by adding it to your direct debit and signing the gift aid declaration)

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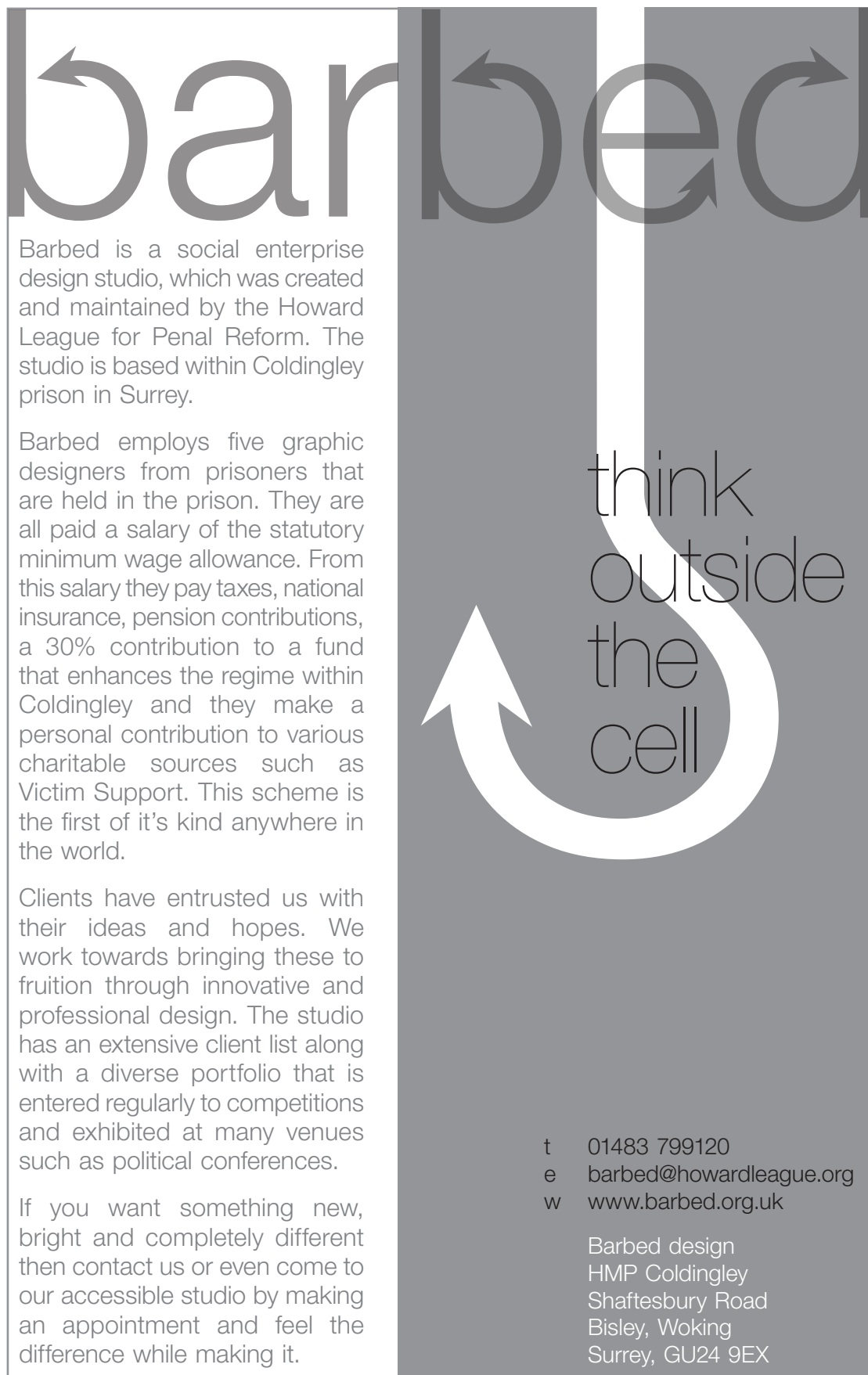
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barbed

Barbed is a social enterprise design studio, which was created and maintained by the Howard League for Penal Reform. The studio is based within Coldingley prison in Surrey.

Barbed employs five graphic designers from prisoners that are held in the prison. They are all paid a salary of the statutory minimum wage allowance. From this salary they pay taxes, national insurance, pension contributions, a 30% contribution to a fund that enhances the regime within Coldingley and they make a personal contribution to various charitable sources such as Victim Support. This scheme is the first of it's kind anywhere in the world.

Clients have entrusted us with their ideas and hopes. We work towards bringing these to fruition through innovative and professional design. The studio has an extensive client list along with a diverse portfolio that is entered regularly to competitions and exhibited at many venues such as political conferences.

If you want something new, bright and completely different then contact us or even come to our accessible studio by making an appointment and feel the difference while making it.

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The Howard League for Penal Reform works for a safe society where fewer people are victims of crime

The Howard League for Penal Reform believes that offenders must make amends for what they have done and change their lives

The Howard League for Penal Reform believes that community sentences make a person take responsibility and live a law-abiding life in the community

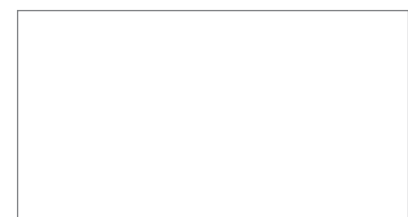
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