

The Street Weapon's Commission
Lesley Pulman

Fay Selvan

Lesley Pulman. Community Campaigner for Witnesses and Victims.

Lesley Pulman

Yes.

Fay Selvan

Thank you very much for coming and giving us evidence this afternoon. I understand that you rose to prominence after single-handedly taking on a violent gang of yobs in your estate in Manchester in New Mosston.

Lesley Pulman

I wasn't quite exactly like that because I had the support of the police and service. And people in the community that did things in their own way. You know so they enabled to do what I did. You can't do something like that totally alone. It's just the lone ranger theme isn't it for the press.

Fay Selvan

Yes. OK well thank you. We've heard lots of evidence today and in fact some of our last witnesses were making the case that locking up offenders per say can sometimes make the situation worse rather than better and I understand that from your evidence you take a slightly different approach. That you think we should be far tougher towards offenders and have more enforcement.

Could you tell us a bit about that?

Lesley Pulman

Well a lot of people think because they go to prison it makes things worse or they get targeted further. It doesn't mean that the prison isn't the appropriate

punishment for what they've done. I know punishment has become a dirty word nowadays but when push comes to shove all the support services for perpetrators that's fine. The interventions they can do anything they want. But the bottom line you're always going to need witnesses. And there's always got to be consequences for the things that are happening on the streets now in my opinion and from me vast experience. I've been 20 years working in the community. I've watched my perpetrators grow up in my area. And I knew when they was three, five years old, where it was going to end. And they was out permanent Social Services in their lives. Almost permanent. And it didn't make the slightest bit of difference. So if you're saying that prison don't work I can say that support doesn't work equally. There are individuals, there are families that do benefit from support. But there is a minority, a hardcore of families and individuals that don't not just don't benefit they won't engage with it. They'll go through all the motions with all the service providers and they'll make believe that they're doing this that and the other but in reality they do not engage with it. So what do we do? Do we walk away? There's got to be consequences and I think the violence we've got now is the results of being too soft very earlier on with these young people. Because when you go in the court nowadays you'd be hard pressed to know which is the victim. And you'll recognise the victim because it's a solitary figure on its own with nothing round. Possibly victim support if they're lucky. No advisors. And the perpetrator with his team of supporters. And until we separate the victim from the perpetrator and their human rights become on an equal par with perpetrators because we're not now. Then we're not going to solve anything. The human rights have been hijacked by the perpetrators and criminals. And it worked for us. Prison works for the community because it gives them respite. When I did ASBOs I could only get them on ASBOs. I went to court many times in the 12 month previously. Through the normal court system. And as I was coming out of one door they was coming out of the other. As I was getting

home they was back on the corner doing what they do. So that didn't work. But when I planned for my breaches and people think because they're breaching they've not worked. There's consequences to those breaches. An ASBO in itself is not a punishment. It's a stern warning. It's intervention to give the community respite. So we waited just for them to breach and they did within the first week. We reported them. We went to court and they were jailed for six and nine months. And that was it as far as we was concerned. It worked for us. Hopefully it would work for them in the sense. Well they never come back bothering us again. So the community has got to be at the top and be put before the perpetrator. They've got to have respite. You can't do anything against gun crime, knife crime, without witnesses. And witnesses won't do it without support. And the support systems for witnesses are almost nil. You need a 24 hour seven day a week 52 week a year support service and an advocate for that witness. Somebody just for them. Like the perpetrator has they see the barristers for months. Victims don't see the barristers. They may see him a few minutes before they go in the court. They need an advocate for them. I don't mean to interfere in the case. I mean to address their needs solely. To have an authority to make sure that if they're being intimidated that that person can contact the police, can contact service providers. A witness shouldn't have all these things to think about. You've been put out of work because of what you're doing you need somebody to get your benefits in place. If you've got to leave your home you need money to move and leave your home. You know and this is what I ... I've been at it. I've been a witness. I've been victim. A community campaigner. And I've also been a service provider. And everyone of them are soul destroying. Every single one of those positions. And all I want is at least an equal footing that witnesses and victims with perpetrators. If you look at the groups, and there's many, many of them of support for perpetrators. You go home tonight and you all try and find all these groups for support victims.

Fay Selvan

OK let me see if anybody has got any questions for you on the panel. Gus.

Gus

You're advocating more prison sentences for the young offenders?

Lesley Pulman

I'm advocating appropriate consequences per offence. It's not we'll put all these people in prison or we'll support all these people. If you went to a restaurant and you picked up a menu you would look at the fare and you would choose something off that menu that would serve your needs and that is the same with perpetrators. Whatever the offending calls for it should be metered out. It's not one size fits all.

Gus

There is evidence, is there not, that ASBOs frankly have been a disaster? They do not work. So what would you see what would you say we should do about the underlying causes of these young peoples?

Lesley Pulman

I'll tell you why ASBOs haven't worked and it's because at the beginning there was all this hoo-ha with the press and the Together campaign. Every ASBO I've been involved with I've worked with many, many families witnesses to anti social behaviour and criminal behaviour. And I've had a witness that got taken in a car with a gun by a gang and got told she'd have her hands cut off if she didn't stop filling them diaries in. So anti social behaviour it's criminality dumbed down in most cases and it does lead to criminal convictions in some cases. But it doesn't work because the service providers have not been all working together. And by service providers I mean the

courts, the government even, a judge now cannot send probably a defender for breaches even service breaches to prison. He could but there's nowhere to send. There's no prisons. There's not enough police to police them. But I've seen peoples lives change. I've seen communities turned round. I've seen people empowered into coming out and doing things that they would never have done before. It's changed lives. It changed mine. I'm still living in my home that I've lived in from being 11 years old. That I was offered 30 thousand pound for at the time. it's now worth 150. That's the difference. And the thing was if I'd have fled like most people do it would have been boarded up to some buy to let merchant. Our whole area would have gone down like a domino and you'd have another regeneration area. That's what ASBOs do. They saved our area from becoming a regeneration area.

Fay Selvan

Can you just perhaps tell us because you talked about a particular family on your estate and you said there was lots of intervention what do you think would be an effective intervention at an earlier stage when those children were three that would have made a difference because presumably you don't think there's something inherent about the person that's going to make them turn out?

Lesley Pulman

The family I was dealing with there was three generations in that household. Three generations. They was a criminal family. The grandmother actually lunged at a witness in the court. That's the grandmother. The mother was a drug addict, alcoholic, whatever you name. It had had six children. They bought the property. I don't live on an estate. I live in one of the supposedly least crime rates in Manchester. But you only need one or two families to come in and that is your place has gone. She'd had twins took off

her who had been bought up by the grandmother. She had three year old twins by another man. And she had two children in care. And they decided to put them all together in one house and bring them back together again.

And I had three year old twins and you'll have to pardon me language but this is the reality of it. Those three year old twins, beautiful children. A boy and a girl. Social Services thought it was quite fine to live in a crack house. Full of drugs. Not getting fed proper. The mother drinking a bottle of vodka with one baby under one arm and throwing it in the street with the other. They was kicking a police van, the three year olds, along with the older siblings calling the police fucking wankers. Now what do you suggest to do with those three year old children?

Fay Selvan

Well yeah that was my question to you.

Lesley Pulman

Well you'd take them away but the Social Services doesn't. The police actually took those children out for their own safety. Not Social Services, the police. And I had the other family that they hooked up with I've been involved with Social Services for seven years with that family. I'd got one of the boys accommodation. I'd got him a course at college. I'd got him on benefits to get him away from that. I spent me own money feeding him for two weeks while his benefits come through. I got him under a doctor. And six weeks later he was back with that family and when I challenged him I said you're gonna have to choose now which side you're on now. And he said I'm not going out to work for four quid an hour coz I can get 25 quid for three seconds work pinching a mobile.

Fay Selvan

So on that point this will be the last question I would ask you today what

would be the one thing you think we need to do to reduce gun and knife crime? What would you like to see happen?

Lesley Pulman

I think you should all the support that's going on is fine. Everything you can do to support. Regeneration. The facilities for young people. However, even like the houses being done out. You know living in a beautiful house on a beautiful estate. All done out with all the facilities is no good if you haven't got law and order and control. And you've got to build trust. You've got the service providers, the experts, on the outside looking in at the situation and the other side of it you've got the community on the inside looking out. And never the twain shall meet. You've got to listen. I mean I despair. I've come to do this I'm compelled to do it but I have no faith in whatever they come up with here, whatever you put to the government and there'll be a big hoo-ha when it's released and it'll just be another file. Another set of laws. We've got all the laws. We've got everything we need. We need police officers to enforce that law and we need prisons for appropriate sentencing. Today 500 criminals are being released halfway through their sentence because there's not enough room in the prisons. That is not justice you've got no justice in the community. The community will not engage.

Fay Selvan

Thank you. Thank you very much for coming and giving us evidence this afternoon.

Lesley Pulman

You're welcome

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