

## **The Street Weapon's Commission**

CHATTER

### **Commissioner**

Hello welcome to Reaghelle Peltier and Nicole McLaren from the Next Generation. It is really great to see some younger people here today because we're all a bit old foggy and a lot of our witnesses have been, but it's really fantastic to have read in your evidence you've provided.. the work that you're doing through Next Generation. What inspired you to go out and start speaking to gang members and what difference do you think you've made?

CHATTER

### **Nicole McLaren**

It's not only going out and speaking to gang members. Our organisation is a youth led, youth organisation so it is set up to speak too and engage with young people on a whole so regardless whether you're in a gang or not we get up and we go out outreach work and try and get young people into jobs. Try and empower them and instil self esteem and build on the confidence so they can actually go out and think that I am somebody.

### **Commissioner**

Mmm

### **Reaghelle Peltier**

So what inspired us to, to actually get up out of our beds and do this work..? cos we are only young like myself I'm only 20, my colleagues 22 and.. it's just growing up within Manchester, growing up and being young ourselves, coming through the educational system.. not seeing any visible doors of opportunity open to us. On the positive we just decided to open them doors ourselves and encourage other young people our age in our generation to

think positive and prosper.

**Commissioner**

Okay brilliant thank you. Gus did you want to...?

**Gus**

Well welcome. Firstly a word of congratulation on... setting up Next Generation at all and for what you've done since you've started. In particular.. your recent successful event at the Bridgewater Hall. Let me ask you... you started clearly as a body of people concerned about the matters that you've just said Nicole. Was there a reason why you as young women decided to do this as [astinct] from a whole gang of guys?

**Nicole McLaren**

[LAUGHS] It's just knowing that we could do it cos our.. coming from the background that we came from obviously we witnessed and.. experienced the same things as young people out there especially the young black males that are out we've witnessed it and.. we know what's going on. So having the family unit that we've had empowering us to go out there knowing that we can make a change knowing those young people cos we ran youth centres, we've put on different shows and interacted with young people all over Manchester and as young women, we feel we know we're powerful and we can have a good impact and a positive impact on everyone out there cos it's easier for us to interact obviously with the males as well.

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Aye

**Nicole McLaren**

[INAUDIBLE] and try and get them on the positive.

LAUGHING

**Nicole McLaren**

And with the females it's we can relate so we can just relate on every level so it's just... being a young black woman it does, it is empowering to know that we can go out there and we can help other young people whatever age you are.

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Of our generation.

**Gus**

So Reaghelle what success have you all had in.. getting young men involved in what you're doing, actively.

**Reaghelle Peltier**

I don't know. It must, away from the looks, it must just be

LAUGHING

**Reaghelle Peltier**

the way we come across you know like to the young males. I don't know cos obviously we're interacting with other young males of our generation so it's easy for us to just talk to them on a level because obviously today you've got like, you could call it text talk, slang, broken English.

**Nicole McLaren**

[Dubonics].

**Reaghelle Peltier**

But [LAUGHS] you know what I'm saying it's just talking to them on a real level because they understand that we over stand their struggle. Do you know what I'm saying so it's just, I don't know, they hear us and we just reel and the thing is now you've gotta let them know what it is that you're doing and what you're trying to achieve because communication is the key and the thing is a lot of young people out there.. just don't really know the ins and outs of set things because they've not... I don't know it's like the educational system is not... See how we interact with young people yer we break things down on a level.. where we just, we don't try and sugar-coat anything in any way. Yer we just get straight to the point and we're very direct and young people are very direct and straight to the point these days. You don't need to sugar-coat it for them cos they understand.

**Gus**

Mmm

**Reaghelle Peltier**

You know what I'm saying, they.. accept the fact that you know, if you're being real with them they know it, that's where the trust will come into it because if you're being real I'll trust you more instead of you trying to hide things. There's a lot of...

**Gus**

So what impact do you think you've had on young people, young men's involvement in gangs and...

**Reaghelle Peltier**

What impact..? I'll tell you the truth I'm not gonna lie... what we do yer we change lives yer in a positive way. We change lives I'm not gonna lie there

the powers that we kind of like have right about now. When we talk to young people now yer if we can help you we'll help you, if we can't help you we'll find someone that can help ya. So our organisation is just about creating opportunity in every way. If you're in.. a gang yer right it's.. the struggle is today now yer I mean young people are seeing, they're intimidated by these gangs and that but it's just lost young people. They're just lost they don't know anything other than the streets. Do you get what I'm saying? There's no like Nicole was saying there's no visible opportunities out there for them and if there is yer it's hard to reach for them because they might of.. they might have a criminal record and it's like, that kind of like follows them around yer so when they're ready to change or.. you know try and make something of themselves they've still got that following them around and that just closes a lot of doors for them. Then they lose confidence... lose faith, you get what I'm saying that they can be and that's where we come into it. With us being younger and them seeing that you know... I can see yous making it, if yous can make it I know yous have come from the streets. I can make it and that's what we show them. If we can make it you can make it and that's how we interact.

**Commissioner**

Thanks Mark.

**Mark**

Yer I'm interested I read your brief and I found it interesting I hear similar stories echoed all the way through and it's probably often less talked about the role of a woman with a gun and gang crime.. and you've put here about they're the ones who hold the guns. Can you describe that a little bit more of the role of a woman?

**Reaghelle Peltier**

I'm not a member of that brief.

**Mark**

[LAUGHS]

**Reaghelle Peltier**

[LAUGHS]

**Mark**

But you know like a woman's role [TALKING OVER EACH OTHER]

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Yer, yer I'm not gonna lie that does happen... Like a lot of bad things that happen that is one of the things that does happen. I mean young females get involved in... holding weapons, could be holding drugs or whatever cos they just, cos they're lost as well they just wanna be involved. You get what I'm saying. It's just like how can I say, young females get involved in every way I mean, you can... there could be a gang of females yer, balaclavas doing what they do but you're just assuming that it's males. That's how smart females are you get what I'm saying. Very, very versatile and we can multitask a lot.

LAUGHING

**Reaghelle Peltier**

There's a lot of things that we can do, you get what I'm saying but the focus is on like the males but

**Nicole McLaren**

The young black males.

**Reaghelle Peltier**

the females.. are involved in set ways you get what I'm saying it's just not the majority but they are involved you get what I'm saying and it's just like they... when young people haven't got, they can't go home and feel comfortable yer they go out on road to what they know best like the peers and everything. That's their family. That becomes their family so whatever they're into it's kind of like they follow. They just follow trend. You get me. And girls are the same way as the males. They do the same thing. I'm not gonna get into but even when it comes to the relationship side you get what I'm saying when they're... when the guys are just like there for one thing, sometimes the girls are.

LAUGHING

**Reaghelle Peltier**

That's just the way it is.

**Nicole McLaren**

It's not just a young lad thing.

**Reaghelle Peltier**

You know its visa versa. The women can do what the male can do and just sometimes just as good.

**Nicole McLaren**

[INAUDIBLE]

**Gus**

So how would you be dealing with the girls in that situation?

**Reaghelle Peltier**

With the girls?

**Gus**

What particular things would you do?

**Reaghelle Peltier**

With the girls yer it's just... it's getting other girls yer that understand. They get me to talk to them. That's what it is because they're not really hearing the males they just.. if it's a good looking male they're not hearing anything.

LAUGHING

**Reaghelle Peltier**

You get what I'm saying so they're not really hearing the males but then a female now that can understand that that may have you know been involved

**Nicole McLaren**

Hmm

**Reaghelle Peltier**

cos like myself and Nicole now yer it's like.. we've been in the wrong place at the wrong time... yer just cos we'll be like sometimes 2/3 o'clock in the morning and believe it or not there's a lot of young people on the streets at that time. Do you get what I'm saying but it's like if we were to come across and speak to a young female that is caught up in that type of stuff yer because we've got our experiences and we can share our experiences with her and she can you know visa versa. It's like okay and I can see how you can get through it. Obviously they can see how it can be done because we're

pulling through so.

**Mark**

Through support?

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Yer, yer support and being a positive role model. Cos I believe that we're positive role models you get what I'm saying cos going through the struggle we, no matter what it is that we get involved in we always try to stay on the positive, you get what I'm saying. Even being in the wrong place at the wrong time we just try and focus and stay in the positive and being younger it trust me it's hard to stay on the positive. It is hard because it's like, there's so many doors of opportunity down a negative path. You get what I'm saying but on the positive paths it's like they're always getting closed in your face, you get what I'm saying. Or they're not that visible. So it's hard.

**Commissioner**

I'm gonna ask Ian to ask something yer but before I just do I just have to ask you what made you positive and able to do the things you've done like set up the organisation and do the event at the Bridgewater? What made you have that level of confidence in saying I'm gonna get myself out of this and do something [INAUDIBLE].

**Nicole McLaren**

Taking risks.

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Yer, yer you've gotta take risks.

**Nicole McLaren**

Using Bridgewater Hall for an example that was a big risk for us. That was our biggest, that was set up by our events team which is one of the projects that we run. So... normally we just like do minor events like Zion Centre or Contact Theatre but Bridgewater Hall now stepping into the City centre in a big venue like that.. it was... it took a lot of courage to do that and to let other young people know you can come into town. You can and you are allowed to enjoy yourself and we can throw big events like this and for it to run smoothly.

**Commissioner**

Mmm, mmm

**Nicole McLaren**

And it...

**Commissioner**

So what who did anyone help you or did it come from within or?

**Reaghelle Peltier**

It was like yer people...

**Commissioner**

Both?

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Do you know what people help ya but..? you've gotta get the people to help you so that's your work you get what I'm saying. You've gotta go out there and find the right people so I'm not gonna sit here and say we done it ourself because we've got an events team but at the same time now yer... we've gotta find the strength to get up early in the morning and to go out and find the right people yer to hold this... to obviously put on this event. That's the

work you get me cos if you find the wrong person that can't do that then it... falls on you so that's the work, you've gotta get up early in the morning and make sure you're empowering this person yer to do what they're supposed to do yer to hold this event. You get what I'm saying and that's where the work comes into it. You've gotta, like with our team we've got a team yer, we've had to find the right young people of that team. We've had to go out and get them that's the work.

**Commissioner**

Okay.

**Nicole McLaren**

Yer.

**Unidentified Man**

Hi Reaghelle I wanna applaud both of you for the work that you're doing and I don't think you being out on the street there at 2 o'clock in the morning trying to change life is being in the wrong place at the wrong time...

**Nicole McLaren**

[INAUDIBLE]

**Unidentified Man**

I'm just looking at the sort of... from what I've got here, the vague structure of how you operate and I'm looking at the possibility of... other... young people in other areas of the country may want to replicate what you do.

**Nicole McLaren**

Hmm

**Unidentified Man**

What sort of success have you had in terms of.. some of the, because what you've got is quite a large number of things. You're into construction and entertainment and all that. What sort of success do you get and what sort of obstacles do you come across while you're trying to do this? For example do you get support from your local council or your local CBS... to help you along the way?

**Nicole McLaren**

We get support

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Yer

**Nicole McLaren**

but not what we'd want but we do get support and...

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Fffffff

**Nicole McLaren**

and it's pressure. It is pressure.

**Reaghelle Peltier**

It gets pressure.

**Nicole McLaren**

and it has been pressure running it ourselves cos the whole of our board are.. under the age of 25 so.. it's like we've set this up knowing what we want to do but not knowing the arenas that we're jumping into. So we've set it up okay

but... we want to run an organisation. We had to go and knock on doors to find out okay what we need. Step by step constitution, policies, CIB checks all of that we had to go through the whole process and the support that we've had from the city council and from our [INAUDIBLE] co-ordinators and local councillors it's helped us to get where we are but obviously we could... be supported

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Mmm

**Nicole McLaren**

on a bigger scale. But like getting our projects into schools and.. having it into youth centres and things like that.

**Reaghelle Peltier**

We've done all that ourself it's like we've [COUGHS]. It's like we've... the main like we've gone out for he help yer. I mean obviously you can't wait for help to come to ya but... phhhhh it would be nice at times, you know what I'm saying, or like obviously when people've actually see you on the map that they come to ya and they're genuinely looking to help ya. It would be good if you had that a lot you know what I'm saying, but there's just coming into this, like I said at the beginning yer it was just an idea.. It was just an idea and the vision was up here before we actually brought it to life you know what I'm saying, but we knew that it could be brought to life yer and we have faith that it could be brought to life so where we, that's why we are where we at today and with all the help and everything, we've gone out and got, we worked hard for, do you get what I'm saying. Everything we've put in our... as young people, yer away from the next generation, we just want to prosper anyway. We believe that we can, do you get what I'm saying. My main ambition is to set up a wine bar but I know that by setting that up now yer

it can tie in with the next generation. You know what I'm saying I see the bigger picture, we think outside of the box.

**Unidentified Man**

So the, the young people that you target how do you come across them? Do you just walk up to them in the street?

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Just walk up to them and just...

**Unidentified Man**

Or, or are they specifically people who you know are on the wrong side of the law for example.

**Nicole McLaren**

There's... young people that we've grown up with and that are on the wrong side of the tracks like everyone likes to say. But erm, and there's also young people that we just approach that we might never have spoke to before.

**Reaghelle Peltier**

And never seen before.

**Nicole McLaren**

Or seem before but we'll just go and approach them and talk to them. Cos that...

**Unidentified Man**

What's the reception like?

**Nicole McLaren**

The receptions... the receptions always good

**Reaghelle Peltier**

[INAUDIBLE]

**Nicole McLaren**

because we are of the same generation so

**Unidentified Man**

Hmm

**Nicole McLaren**

I can change the way I'm talking from now and... add a bit more slang to what I'm saying.

**Unidentified Man**

[INAUDIBLE]

LAUGHING

**Nicole McLaren**

And it's, it's easier.

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Sorry, for example now yer just say like erm you got like a, there's a, there's a young crowd yer and you've got a grown person cos I don't want to call yous old cos you're just grown folks, you're just older then us yer.

LAUGHING

**Reaghelle Peltier**

So just, just... for example now yer erm.. a grown person approaches a, a group of young people. It's like huhhh.. is this [INAUDIBLE] sorry the police. Is this the police or what's your motive really? You know what I'm saying. You're just thinking loads of things so you're not even really listening to what they've got to say cos you thinking all this. But a young person approaches ya it's like, okay see, so that's what you're on, alright it sounds interesting. So you can help me with that cos you're listening, you're just taking everything in. You get what I'm saying, we, we just approach a great big, it don't matter how many there is yer, we'll just approach them and start talking to one or like a, a few that's just there and before you know it you've got all of them listening to ya. They're listening to what it is you do, or what you're offering. Do you get what I'm saying and before you know it they want to come down to your office and everything. Before we even got an office yer, it's like we was on street doing outreach work just with a, a Dictaphone and a video recorder. Do you get what I'm saying so it is like, everyone was like oh what yous doing, what's this for and we was like oh we're just going to capture the on scene talent on the streets do you get what I'm saying cos we're looking to set up a youth organization, what do you think? And then we got like a

**Nicole McLaren**

Petitions

**Reaghelle Peltier**

petition out now yer and questionnaires and people just filled it in cos they was just backing the cause. But it was just like all young people. It was harder for us to get parents and like the older generation like their signature and their backing. But the young people it was just quick like that, do you get what I'm saying, because obviously as young people we can interact more on a level with other young people of our generation so we can get the job done.

The older generation what they need to do yer, is guide us. Show us the way.  
The links there making visible to us so we can relate it to them.

**Commissioner**

[TALKING OVER EACH OTHER] Quick last question from Gus.

**Gus**

Erm in two parts, 1) do you get

**Commissioner**

That was quick, that was quick [LAUGHS]

**Gus**

Do you get commissioned by schools to do work and secondly, erm... do you see yourselves being able to politicize young people more about their situation so that they see themselves as agents of change?

**Nicole McLaren**

Like we're not commissioned, we're not called in by schools, we're not grafted in. We actually go down and knock on doors and say look, this is what we do, this is how we do it and.. even in reception like.. once we're in the schools, it's like all the young people, if they know us they'll come run up to us "oh you in here today or, you doing this session today" or whatever because we go like round to youth centres and do it, do the same.

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Mmm

**Nicole McLaren**

So and that, that's how.. erm we get into the schools because of de, like the

demand from the young people and they see that, the head teachers and teachers see how we can relate on a level and that we can get a positive message through to them more clearly than they can and for the second part of your question I didn't really understand it so can you break it down again please [LAUGHS]

LAUGHING

**Commissioner**

I was gonna say that.

**Gus**

In the community meetings that there have been after this... disaster outside the whole

**Nicole McLaren**

Yer

**Gus**

following your concert

**Nicole McLaren**

Hmm

**Gus**

there's been... a some suggestion that it would help to politicize young people about taking action in their own defence. I just wondered whether you see that as an outcome of the work you're doing?

**Commissioner**

Taking action?

**Gus**

Yer

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Well yer...

**Gus**

Organising themselves to..

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Well yer because at the end of the day now we don't feel that, we thought yer that... we would, it was something positive trying to bridge the gap between young people and, not just the old generation but like Manchester City Council, the Police and everyone else you get what I'm saying. Bringing down.. bringing down like the grown people to watch how the young people are actually doing it for themselves. How they can come together in... in a large amount of numbers and be on the positive and no dramas you get what I'm saying? We, we thought we was doing something positive by showing that but... being stamped on, cos that's...

**Nicole McLaren**

[INAUDIBLE]

**Reaghelle Peltier**

that's exactly, that's one of the obstacles yer, being stamped on it's like we've been stamped on before and at the end of the day yer, either way we're just gonna keep pushing through but at the same time now

**Nicole McLaren**

[INAUDIBLE]

**Reaghelle Peltier**

we're gonna fight you get what I'm saying? Cos it's always positive. When we fight yer, it's always in a positive way yer and we have to fight for justice cos at the end of the day people need to know that we are out here, we are good, and we are out here, and we are trying and we're trying to... phhhh, we try to help one another but it's just that, we only, there's only certain, we don't really know how, you get what I'm saying? We feel that, you, you was there before us you get what I'm saying, so you, you should have the majority of the answers. We're just, we're lost and trying to find our way.

LAUGHING

**Reaghelle Peltier**

You get what I'm saying? And this is how we're trying to find our way and we're just trying to let you know that by holding that big event yer it's just trying to let everyone know that we're there.

**Gus**

Sure

**Reaghelle Peltier**

We're there and we're trying

**Gus**

It's getting through.

**Reaghelle Peltier**

100% you get what I'm saying.

**Gus**

Thanks.

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Hand on heart we are trying to interact yer with other young people in all different areas within Manchester. Cos it can be done.

**Commissioner**

I've been lobbied to allow 1 more question. Mark [LAUGHS]

**Mark**

I just wanna say that I... really like some of the one liners. It said the people we help are like roses growing through concrete. I really like that one.

**Nicole McLaren**

On a level it is because we are on the grass roots and we work with young people coming from all different types of background whether it's single parent families or erm substance abuse going on in the home or... I... having a bad erm... like, how can I say it, coming through the educational system now yer and just not getting anything from it. We work with young people that have just got a low confidence and low self esteem so, brining them through this and letting them think okay, I am somebody and I can do this and I can go out there and get a job and make something of my life instead of going round the corner and selling some drugs or.. just going to the shop and buying some alcohol thinking oh I'm just gonna chill or go and smoke some weed. It's like they are roses growing through the concrete and the concrete is the struggle.

**Commissioner**

Mmm

**Nicole McLaren**

And when, when we know we can help someone or house someone or actually instil some confident, confidence and empower someone, that is a rose going through the concrete.

**Commissioner**

Right

**Nicole McLaren**

That is a rose coming out of this struggle.

**Reaghelle Peltier**

It can happen, it can happen and that's what makes us. Cos obviously I'll just to tell you now we don't get funded, you get what I'm saying. We not on no salaries.

**Nicole McLaren**

Voluntary.

**Reaghelle Peltier**

But I aint gonna say that obviously cos

LAUGHING

**Reaghelle Peltier**

let's not get it twisted. It will happen you get what I'm saying but it's them type of things yer like change, that's why I said, we change lives, you know what I'm saying and it's them type by doing that, that's how we get like... that's how

we carry, that's what gets us up in the morning.

**Nicole McLaren**

Mmm

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Because trust me if... I tell, when I was in school yer, obviously I had to get up in the morning. Going through all that now yer and college and that, I don't really have to get up yer.. early in the morning, but doing this now that's what makes me get up early in the morning because I know that I can help someone, whilst doing what I'm doing because... I'm prospering regardless, I'm gonna prosper, yer but if I can prosper yer whilst, and help someone at the same time then I've got nothing to lose.

**Nicole McLaren**

Exactly

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Cos I've got loads of friends.

**Commissioner**

I might know the answer to me next question but erm first of all I want to say I came to your thing at Bridgewater Hall and it was fabulous and there were some real roses there it was a great night.

**Reaghelle Peltier**

Thanks.

**Commissioner**

Erm but erm... just one last question for you both. If there was one thing you

could do to reduce gun and knife crime what would it be? What would be the thing you would want to happen that you know would make a real difference?

**Reaghelle Peltier**

More job opportunities. Cos they're only doing what they know best you know what I'm saying? They're only, they're doing what they know best yer and they're making money doing what they're doing yer on a street level. If they knew that they could make money on this level yer they would but it's just like I said, doors are getting closed [CLAPS HANDS TOGETHER] like this on a regular basis, you get what I'm saying so if there was more doors open to opportunity there yer right and they can work and put time and effort into it and get paid for it that's what they'd do. Away from that so that would just reduce it. Standardly.

**Commissioner**

Okay, thank you very much. Very inspiration.

CLAPPING

CHATTER

CUT