

'Gangs of Glasgow' – An Enterprise Model for Positive Youth Engagement for 2014

This perspective on gangs in Glasgow comes from reflecting on what can be done to tackle a seemingly intractable problem in a new and innovative manner.

My counter-intuitive proposal is to **establish gangs**.

Summary – Rather than working against gangs, tap into their leadership and strong points to establish a new type of gang in Glasgow. Gangs will be set up as community benefit companies that will operate in localities for the benefit of both gang members and residents in the community. The run-up to 2014 provides the impetus to put in place a structure that brings about long-term, sustainable change, using an enterprise model.

The premise is as follows:

Territory – Gangs are largely territorially based, as illustrated in the map opposite, so this is a key factor to tap into rather than work against. This territory will be defended at considerable cost – to gang members, residents and society. However, let this defence be channelled into productive outcomes, such as environmental improvement, safety, life style, learning and life circumstances, resulting in significant improvement for communities, their residents and gang members.



Leadership – Gang leaders are largely effective at the task of leadership. Over 170 gangs have been identified across Glasgow by Strathclyde Police, each with a leader and structure. They provide a vision, mobilise resources, and organise these towards a common end to which followers contribute. The problem is the misalignment between this end and what society would like it to be.

Nudging – From Jeremy Bentham's 'rational choice theory' to Sunstein and Thaler's Nudge, there is the common current of getting people to *want* to do something rather than telling them they *have* to. The prevailing current is moving away from the 'nanny state' to one of balancing liberty and choice, eg "you're free to make a choice, we'd just like to help you make the right one". The recent Campaign Against Violence is a part of this nudge process.

Glasgow on the map – What I propose is a large-scale 'nudge' initiative that has the makings of international headlines – for the right reasons, rather than "No Mean City" or the 'razor gangs'. The problem of Glasgow's gangs too often makes the headlines for the wrong reasons, and with the economic downturn, the problem could well be exacerbated. This profiling could leverage funding for the proposed ground-breaking initiative.

Politicians – These key stakeholders will be brought on board from the outset, to align their success criteria and those of the initiative. Key to support will be to meet citizen needs, so citizens of the community affected will also be fully engaged from the outset.

Prove the concept – Choose the worst area in Glasgow for gang problems. Target and invite the leaders to a series of meetings at which they are invited to view the 'business opportunity'. This is similar to inviting business angels to invest in a business. They are no longer part of the problem – as profiled in the press about similar meetings to which they have been 'invited' to attend – but rather viewed as part of the solution and as potential investors in a new business model.

Business opportunity – The business opportunity is to contribute to the establishment and subsequent franchising of a new model of gangs in Glasgow. These gangs will be based around territory, or other bonding means if more beneficial, and established as community interest companies, similar to a co-operative, into which members will be invited to join.

Franchise terms – The terms of business will be around building camaraderie, competition, fitness, improving life circumstances, educating members, gaining employment, changing lifestyles, contributing to the community, safety and self-help. The model will be tested initially to firm up its feasibility, and societal and economic benefits, to codify the process and lay the foundation for franchising. Pace of franchising will be important in order to get to the 'tipping point' of take-up and impact.

Precedent – There is a long history of channelling enthusiasm and focus through a combination of self-help and leverage. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was a depression-era New Deal initiative in the US that has left its legacy of facilities across the American countryside. Gangs in some inter-city areas in the US have been co-opted for safety purposes. The current Equally Well pilots across Scotland aim to tap into 'assets' which are inherent in the community. The business model of franchising is well established, from McDonald's to the Boy Scouts.

Transition – The new gangs can be a migration of the established gangs to the new model – similar to the integration of the armed wing of the ANC into the South African army and police – or new gangs set up through the leverage of current leaders. It will be pivotal to tap into the current leadership, however, since without them things would at best fail and at worst result in enhanced gang conflict. The experience of Northern Ireland (irrespective of the current blip in trouble), South Africa and Germany point the way towards integration.

Incentives – Power. Gang leaders have power, and while the odd one may be less attuned to channelling this power for productive benefit (in which case the influence of the state can be brought to bear), the opportunity to legitimise and channel this power could be an attractive tonic. There are of course other incentives, such as recognition, learning and achievement, but the intent is that these will largely not be monetary. Other incentives can come via the volunteer base and organisation sponsorship opportunities, such as tank and helicopter rides, etc.

Organisation – The new gangs of Glasgow will be given structure, building on what they already have, and might be organised along the lines of the uniformed services, eg army, police, ambulance, fire, health. Gangs will therefore have structure, hierarchy, some form of uniform/insignia to give identity, which will be proudly shown, to both citizens and peers, with the aim of tapping into collegiate strength and competition, similar to 'houses' in schools or units in the army. The initiative will be branded through name and logo to provide an over-arching identity.

Structure – The gangs will implicitly be full time. Hours outside the direct contact gang time will be taken up by school (if that age), family (where they are able to contribute to youth support), other groups (such as church, etc) or employment. Some gang members will be unemployed and may need greater meaningful opportunities than others. Structure will be put in place around sports, applied learning, community service, shadowing sponsors (eg police, fire, health etc). Interventions will need to be co-ordinated across the agencies and partners. Gang members will be pivotal in designing the structure that suits their needs.

Facilities – Supportive facilities can come from community halls, church halls, sports halls, etc. A strong emphasis will be around sports, to enable both health and fitness, and to link to Glasgow 2014 and beyond.

Training – The training of gang leaders and members can be through FE colleges, to accredited standards set by SQA. Organisational subjects, such as administration, organisation, information management and leadership, can be linked to practical subjects such as IT, car maintenance, fashion design, therapies and building trades (representing the needs of both male and female gang members). Gang members will therefore get recognised certificates, peer recognition and tangible skills to aid future employment. Routes to apprenticeships and employment will be a strong current in bringing about sustainable change.

Professional support – This will be provided to tackle problem areas like alcohol and drugs, and mental health and family issues. Much of this is on tap anyway, but effective channelling of support and programme alignment can leverage impact. Best practice and new approaches can be contributed by professionals, such as advice on nudging, innovative approaches to leadership and individual/organisational change. Professionals will enable the change in long-term behaviour.

Volunteers – Community volunteers will be invited to join the programme to lend professional skills and mature experience. These will be targeted from the uniformed services, through a combination of personal time and time off from employers. The cost benefit analysis will aim to show the lower cost to service provision resulting from such a programme, thereby justifying this time investment. And to tap into the human trait of goodwill, the unemployed can also contribute through recognition of the contribution as community service/job opportunity for benefit purposes.

Justice system – The initiative will be aligned with the efforts of the police, courts, Children's Panel and others who deal with the consequences of the activities of current gangs. There will be child protection issues for participants in the initiative.

Governance – A structure akin to John Lewis or the Cooperative movement will be chosen for governance, giving a balance of member contribution and strong leadership.

Funding – Leverage funding to test out the model will be sought from the Lottery Fund, Scottish Government, philanthropists such as Tom Hunter, Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, and corporate giants companies such as First Group, Apple, Coca Cola and RBS. The win-win will come from first-mover entry to a leading edge initiative.

Evaluation – This will be integral to the funding and pilot. A tangible cost benefit analysis built on 'social return on investment' principles will be carried out to weigh up the benefits of lower cost to society through crime, health and underachievement, balanced with the gains of employment, lifestyle and life circumstances. The evaluation will be both short and long term, with the aim of providing enough evidence to take the risk of rolling out the franchise model.

Franchises – The business model will be franchised out to areas across Glasgow, using the codified model outlined from the pilot. There will, however, be ample opportunity to tailor the initiative to local circumstances, within the broad framework.

Many of these components are in place, but other ideas will not have been tried. What I propose is a counter-intuitive approach to a seemingly intractable problem, tailored to today's circumstances, that offers prospects for scalability.

John Deffenbaugh

Frontline

November 2010

john.deffenbaugh@frontlinemc.com

07788 746550