

OUTREACH WORK WITH
YOUNG MEN INVOLVED IN THE
'RENT SCENE' OF CENTRAL LONDON
1988/1989

STREETWISE YOUTH



Barnardos
LONDON

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PREFACE

In this report I shall discuss the nature of Streetwise Youth's Outreach Work with 92 young men working on the streets, station concourses, pubs and clubs of central London. Throughout the report the term 'working men' is used to describe young men engaged in selling sex to survive at street level. Making contact with them, where they are, led to talking about their lives and work, enabling them to share issues important to them. From monitoring detailed reports of 22 Outreach Sessions, certain topics arose time and time again - the most pressing needs of young men who were often cold, hungry and homeless.

The prime aim of Streetwise Youth is to offer informed advice and support, a holistic response to these young men. Their activities have been criminalised and marginalised. They often share suspicion of helping agencies based on past experience of inappropriate service delivery, many seeing themselves as victims of care. Without their trust and willingness to share often intimate details of their lives, this report and the work would have been impossible. Streetwise Youth shares the following findings in the hope of increasing public awareness of the complexity of needs, of these young working men. In making contact with the powerless and disadvantaged, the outreach worker incurs a particular responsibility. This responsibility was owned and shared by two co-workers, Sebastian Sandys and Scott Beveridge.

Since June 1989 the outreach team of Streetwise Youth has been funded through Barnardo's Streets of London Project. This support has enabled two full-time workers to carry on the work detailed in this report and to develop new areas of work, particularly with young black/ethnic minority men. Recruitment of two additional full-time outreach workers is underway and planned to complete a team of four by early 1991.

The first section of the reports offers a definition of Outreach Work and is followed by an outline of the services offered through Streetwise Youth. This is followed in Chapter 2 by a discussion of trends and patterns in the work with young men working the streets. Chapter 3 describes the main topics and issues covered in Outreach Sessions and finally Chapter 4 identifies three additional issues requiring consideration.

Mark Kjeldsen
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1. OUTREACH WORK - A DEFINITION

"Outreach work involves contacting young people outside a centre. It is an extension of work linked to a base, such as a youth centre or project. It aims to reach young people in the name of that centre or project, and may in some circumstances bring them back to the base to develop work with them there." National Youth Bureau, (1989).

The Base

The small flat in Earls Court which serves as the Streetwise Youth drop-in centre has been open to young working men since 1985. It forms very much the heart of the project. It is a safe environment where practical needs can be met by offering free food, laundry and washing facilities, use of telephone, housing/welfare resources, and where young men may feel safe enough to share with workers the complexity of needs and issues important to them. Workers can then explore the most effective ways of responding and delivering services. In addition satellite services are provided to the young men by visiting drug and welfare workers. A doctor also runs a weekly general health surgery on the premises.

The Outreach Team share a regular commitment to work in the centre-base and are involved in liaison and networking with other agencies in order to provide a wider range of choice to service-users and to maintain a level of awareness among other agencies of the problems faced by young working men.

Outreach work is complementary to centre-based work in two ways. Contacts and relationships made in-centre are followed up out on the streets, providing a greater understanding of working men's lives, and a different environment in which to interact with them. New contacts made on the streets are often introduced to the workers by existing known contacts and referred back to the centre-based services where appropriate.

Outreach work involves not only providing support to young men where they are but also helps identify needs and creates demands on

centre-based services. Over the year's work covered in this report, the average daily attendance at Streetwise Youth Centre rose from 6.1 - December 1988 figures - to 16.7 October 1989 figures. The number of individuals seen at the centre over that time rose from 29 to 61 in any given month. In retrospect, Streetwise Youth Project was not prepared for such a dramatic increase in demand. Plans to move the centre to larger premises and increase staff had been frustrated. This is a warning to other projects who may want to get out there and see what's going on without anticipating the possible repercussions.

Detached Work

Streetwise Youth Outreach involves working on a detached basis where contacts are met in no other context other than out there. A large number of outreach contacts chose not to attend the centre base or any such service for a variety of reasons;

- not wanting to be grouped,
- fear of labelling by association,
- inconvenience of location/opening hours,
- unwillingness to agree with or conform to the centre rules and regulations,
- fear of peer intimidation/discrimination,
- bad past experience of day centres in general and/or Streetwise Youth drop-in in particular
- fearing they will be reported to the police/social services
- simply because they don't like to be worked with or on.

For these young men in particular, the outreach worker may well be the only support system around. This can make for valuable and rewarding work as well as cause difficulties, when unrealistic expectations and demands are made upon the worker. There is the very real expectation among many contacts that workers are reaching out to them in order to help them in some way, otherwise what are they doing out there? In order to fulfil these expectations it is important that outreach workers carefully explain the aims and objectives of their work and are aware and honest about their limitations and those of the service they offer. Whilst it is vital that professional agencies provide effective support services to all workers, the wide scope and potential of outreach work

requires flexible, supportive, and creative supervision. This is particularly important when working on a detached basis, where the outreach worker may seek understanding and support from supervisors and colleagues who have never met the clients. 'How can you support me when you don't know what I'm doing' - The title of Beckie Cowen's 1989 report on outreach work with drug users, illustrates the predicament well.

Young Working Men On the Rent Scene - A Definition

Age - of the ninety two individuals we met, forty four were known to us through contact at Streetwise Youth Centre Base where priority of access is given to those within the 16- 21 age range. Twenty-one is the age under which their work/sexual activity is criminalised Sixteen is the age at which Streetwise Youth is statutorily allowed to provide access to centre-based services without attracting accusations of harbouring the young men. The mean age of centre-users over this time ranged from 18 - 19.7 in any one month,

Though the Outreach Team has a remit to support young men over 21, we also met with young men under sixteen. Streetwise Youth Outreach Service to predominantly 16 - 25 year olds very much covers the working life of most young men who are working at Street Level.

In the absence of records of dates of birth for all Outreach contacts, it is not possible to calculate the mean age. The age of contact was not relevant to our work unless directly related to our service delivery, i.e. state benefits vary according to age; age-specific hostels. I believe the mean age of Outreach contacts was similar to that of those attending the centre at the time, i.e. approximately nineteen.

The definition of 'working men' involved in the rent scene in this context pertains to the street level of sex industry work. Streetwise Youth Services are geared to respond to those most in need of practical help. Escorts, masseurs, or those working at a similar level do not use the service. Though problematical, and at risk of labelling, rent scene here refers to the bartering of sexual services between men on the streets, stations, pub/club scene within a two mile radius of Piccadilly Circus W.1.

2. OUTREACH RESEARCH

Though research methods are vital for the monitoring and evaluation of client needs and quality of service, outreach work is not research. The outreach worker is essentially a resource for the client rather than the other way round. With this in mind we have tried to ensure that our monitoring systems are service-led. (Indeed Barnardo's research and development experience lends support to workers examining their work in this way).

Information from the records of the year's work.

Total number of interventions (new/repeat)	191
Number of outreach sessions (4/5 hours)	22
Total number of individuals met	92
Total number of individuals met first time	48
Average number of interventions per outreach session	8.7

Making Contact Where They Are - Where Are They?

The bulk of the work reported here took place during the evenings in the pubs and clubs frequented by Streetwise Youth members and their peers. These were venues for both work and play. Young men would pick-up and negotiate the price and service, but also socialise before and after work. It was only from August to October 1989 - sessions 18 - 22, that the availability of a locum co-worker enabled the team to undertake an earlier shift to cover the train stations, which were worked around the early evening rush hour.

Table 1 - Where Contact Was Made

Date:	Session: Number	Contacts per Venue			Contacts: Total	New
		Pub/club	Station	Street		
August 89	18	12	2	4	18	(3)
	19	10	3	2	15	(2)
October 89	20	5	6	1	12	(2)
	21	8	5	2	15	(6)
	22	9	8	2	19	(5)

Table 1 shows an increased proportion of contacts made on stations over the five sessions.

From the records of these five outreach sessions, twenty four contacts, comprising 30% of all contacts, took place on the concourse of stations - see Table 2 - where sophisticated audio and video monitoring and unpredictable levels of both Metropolitan and Transport Police activity made both our work and that of our clients more difficult. However, we were able to make contact with a significantly younger age group who would have been unable to access the pubs and clubs due to the laws regarding consumption of alcohol for those of under 18.

Table 2 - Number/Proportion Of Contacts Made Per Venue

Place	No	%
Pub/Club	44	56%
Station	24	30%
Street	11	14%
Total Interventions	79	100%
New Contacts	18	

The Upward Trend Of Work Over The Year '88/89

Statistics

Outreach work should not be judged merely by the number of individuals seen without reference to quality of service. Increasing demands made upon limited human and time resources, can lead to stress and less time afforded in responding to need. However numbers may provide a performance indicator. Where a service is recommended by existing service users to their peers, it partly indicates the effective response of that service.

New Contacts

Of the ninety two young men we worked with over the year, over half (48) were new contacts comprising 26% of all work. Three quarters of the work remained with maintaining contact and ongoing support to young men we had met before, twenty five of whom we met between 3 - 8 times over the 22 sessions. It is important to create a balance of work between making new contacts and maintaining existing contacts. In order to provide good service delivery to both groups a regular and consistent

profile of outreach work needs to be developed and maintained.

Maintaining A Profile

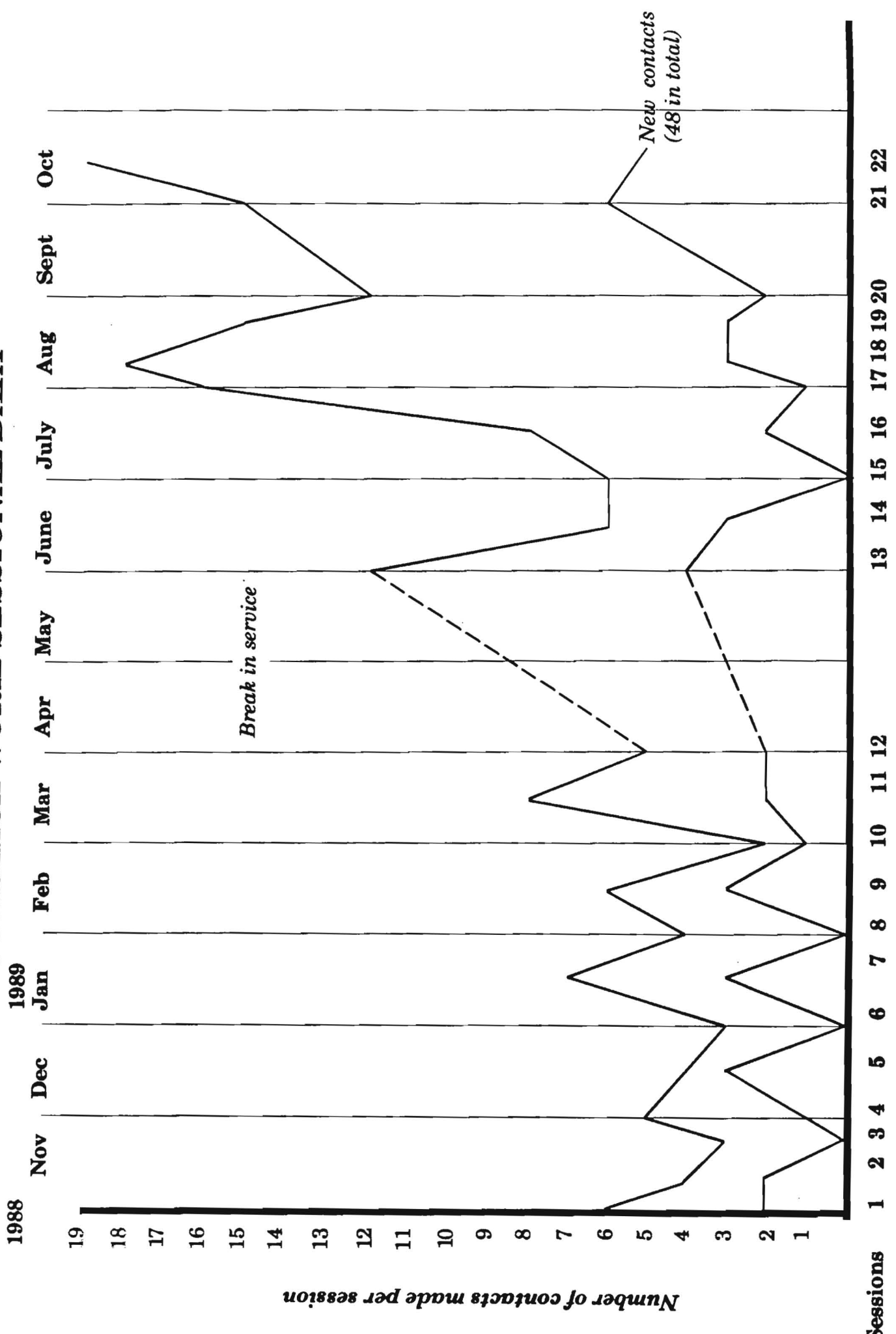
Figure 1 shows that maintaining regular weekly attendance proved impracticable. The breaks in service are explained by the unpredictable availability of co-workers, holidays, sick leave, essential training. Despite these factors the continuity of service was not seriously undermined. All services, and especially those that are funded on a time limited basis must anticipate what will happen to clients/contacts, when services fluctuate or are withdrawn completely. Once contacts have come to terms with you being there, they come to expect you to be there when they need you.

Numbers increased steadily over the year, allowing less time for each contact and necessitating more group work, and less one to one work. This affects the content of conversations and issues arising.

Outreach work can be tedious, one 4/5 hour sessions in March 1989 resulted in two known contacts. Though workers can undertake valuable work in such time, long hours can be spent in fruitless observation. Many of the young men would only want to chat for a short time and it was important for us to respect them and their working/leisure time and avoid being seen as intrusive and/or voyeuristic.

After six months of groundwork the number of contacts made per session increased noticeably. Persistent and regular attendance increased productivity throughout this period as is shown in Figure 1.

OUTREACH WORK: SESSIONAL DATA



3. WHAT THEY TALKED ABOUT

Every contact between a worker and a young man involved a conversation of some kind. New contacts were informed about our service provision and known contacts were reminded of the service simply by our presence. From our conversations a number of topics arose. These topics were detailed in Streetwork reports and coded accordingly to an agreed index e.g.

WP - Work practice,
NFA - Homelessness,
D - Drug use.

Some contacts would present no issues, others many. Each issue was noted and coded. Although this information is not hard statistical information, as for example the number of individuals seen and the proportion of new contacts made, nonetheless it is still useful but should not be used for generalisations or taken out of this specific context.

Work Practice And Price

Please note verbatim quotes extracted from the Streetwork reports have been used to illustrate some of the following issues. All contact names have been changed.

Many contacts involved discussing things in general and working practice in particular.

"Jim, 19 said that the scene is very quiet at the moment due to levels of police activity. Last month he was able to earn £150.00 a night by doing up to 5 punters at £30.00 a time. He mentioned 'car hopping', his term for picking up and doing punters in their cars. Sexual service is usually hand jobs and blow jobs though he will allow punters to 'fuck' him for £60.00+ only with condom and lubricant. He takes a pack with four condoms and two sachets of lubrication and says that will be enough for tonight's work". Report 3/90.

The general price of sexual services rendered ranged from a roof overhead/hot meal, and a return ticket to the West End - i.e. as low as £2.50 - through to the more usual going rate of £30.00/£40.00. This price depends on the service, level of desperation, competitive tendering and negotiation skills. Higher prices of £60.00 - £200.00+ are charged by particularly popular young men, either well connected with rich punters and/or providing specific services such as watersports, scat, sado-masochism, costumes, pornographic photos or anal sex. For further information on the sexual practice of a sample study of young working men a report is available from Streetwise Youth HIV Consultant, Barbara Gibson.

Presenting Issues

A number of factors should be taken into account with regard to the following findings. The Outreach environment is not conducive to objectively collecting pure information. The memory is fallible and though reports are written up soon after each session they only contain what the outreach worker remembers about what went on at the time. The use of formal recording techniques, e.g. tape recorder or questionnaires would be unsuitable in this setting and have drawn attention to work which requires discretion.

Other factors will have affected how freely contacts were prepared to speak with us. Environmental factors such as location, weather conditions, police activity and video cameras affected interactions. Attitudinal factors such as their suspicion of professionals, the relationship between worker and contact, how long they'd known each other and how they felt about each other.

An important issue which especially influenced the health promotion aspect of our work was the way in which contacts were labelled as a high risk group. This stigma created fear, denial, guilt and anger among many contacts as they tried to take on the importance of HIV. It can be difficult to advise and inform about such a sensitive issue in such a harsh, public environment. Creating the additional challenge of how best to educate in a way that was as subtle and potent as the myth and misinformation which we hope to redress.

Given the above, the following is an attempt to record what the young men told us at the time and of the issues that were important enough for them to share with us. Table 3 shows the presenting issues in order of frequency.

Table 3 - Presenting Issues

Issues	No
Food/Hunger	27
NFA/Sleeping out	25
Drug use	20
Legal advice	19
Police hassle	13
HIV Advice/Support	12
Violence	8
General health problems	6
Psychiatric	5
Advice re care	5
Cross gender issues	5
Sexuality	4
Safer sex/Drug use advice	4
Overt racism	3
Employment advice	2
Gambling problem	2
Sexually transmitted diseases	2
Male rape	1
Family	1

Food/Hunger - 27

The most common presenting issue for the young men we met was the need for food. Many had not eaten for days.

"Jeff, 17, sleeping bag in rucksack, says he's sleeping out on the steps of a nearby church, 6 weeks in London from Yorkshire, freezing cold and hasn't eaten since he 'begged a burger yesterday." (Report 20).

"Met Mickey, 17, on station concourse, looks very uncared for, filthy trainers, down-at-heel, unwashed clothes and hair. Say's he's doing O.K, but needs food. Couldn't afford to eat unless he got lucky with a Norman/Hunter/Punter." (Report 18).

These extracts speak for themselves. Young men working at street level are often living a hand to mouth existence. Hunger leads to desperation

and some will sell themselves for survival. They are hungry because they are poor. Though a few youth centres in central London provide food, it is at a cost. Some charities distribute food handouts and soup runs around London but these young men often find the situations dangerous and degrading to compete for food with what they see as older down and outs. They fear for themselves and go hungry.

They are hungry because they are poor, many find it impossible to access any state benefit. The hungry are invariably also the homeless. They can't sign on with no fixed address, they are denied benefits because of their age, they scorn YTS as a form of exploitation and would be unable to sustain training or employment without the stability of a home. Many believe that, if they signed on, they would be traced by police/parents/social workers and would be caught. Many have no one who wants to trace them - literally no one to look after them.

No Fixed Abode/Sleeping Out - 25

"Glen said he'd been sleeping on the tubes since his mum chucked him out last month". (Report 18).

In a survey of 50 young working men attending the Streetwise Youth Centre Base, during the year 1988/1989, 88% were homeless. From files of over 50 young men attending the centre-base in 1989, housing was their most pressing need.

The crisis facing young homeless people in London is critical. The chaos of streetlife undermines an individual's physical, social and psychological wellbeing. The absence of the protection afforded by basic accommodation means that violence and abuse, cold and hunger are part of the reality of their day to day existence. Though Streetwise has successfully placed young men in long-term accommodation it is hard to find and some night shelters appear a more dangerous environment than the street.

"Introduced to Nick C who's sleeping rough in the stairwell of an NCP car part". (Report 8).

"Ted said he's been with a really nasty looking man who picked him up at 4 a.m. He said that he only went with him for a roof overhead and to sleep in a bed for a change". (Report 2).

Such levels of desperation can undermine the power and confidence necessary for negotiation of both reasonable price and service.

Drug Use - 20

The drug that features most frequently in conversation but also in terms of being openly used and dealt in pubs/clubs, was Ecstasy (7), otherwise known as 'E'/XTC/MDMA, selling at between £15.00 to £30.00 a tab. MDMA is a derivative of MDA, a drug popular in the late 70's and early 80's on the New York/San Francisco/London gay/club scene. XTC has become even more prevalent in the late 80's. The young men who used XTC also used acid, a cheaper high at £2.00/5.00 a tab, however XTC users did not use alcohol in combination, as they don't mix well.

All contacts for whom drug use was a presenting issue, were involved in poly-drug use. Alcohol was used in combination with the following:

Acid/LSD	(5)
Heroin	(3)
Amphetamine Sulphate/Speed	(2)
Cocaine	(1)
Methodone	(1)
Valium	(1)

The selling of both XTC and acid had become a highly competitive commercial enterprise at this time. Acid was available in microdot form, some tabs bearing the logo Batman/The Joker, a commercial spin off from the popularity of the film. XTC sold in capsule form is easy to cut/adulterate and some dealers would increase the amphetamine quotient, the 'A' of MDMA, leading to many a sleepless night.

Three contacts mentioned injecting heroin and amphetamine sulphate. For more information about injecting drug use among young working men see Barbara Gibson's report - Safer Sex & Drug Use Awareness (1990).

The prevalence of drug use among these young men led to the outreach worker facing difficulties common to all drug workers - working with individuals who are under the influence of drugs, some of which can dramatically alter moods and lead to volatile behaviour.

Legal Advice 19

The most frequent requests for legal advice related to offences of:

Importuning	(4)
Theft (including 'kiting' - cheque fraud)	(3)
Highway obstruction	(3)
Breach of bail	(2)
Liaison with probation officer for preparation of social enquiry reports	(2)
Legal complication of 'care' orders	(2)
Drug-related (possession of 6 XTC tablets)	(1)
Male rape	(1)
Burglary	(1)

The most common concern was anxiety prior to a court appearance. Young men often asked outreach workers to accompany/support them when appearing before the courts on charges particularly related to prostitution. An apparently minor offence such as Highway Obstruction severely labels the offender. Young men who understood or feared the implications of such offences would be too frightened to attend court. These young men could well find themselves remanded in custody for breaching bail on an offence which does not carry a custodial sentence. Others ended up in custody for non-payment of fines.

Many of the young men were on the run from comparatively minor offences in terms of sentencing but which, if faced, may have had major repercussions on their lives. Sex-related charges such as gross indecency and importuning could lead to rejection by their family and friends and affect future employment options. It is common to come across young men who have been running away for so long that their fears cause them to confuse and exaggerate their past offending history. Sometimes they are running from an offence for which they've never been formally charged.

Outreach workers have attended central London courts in order to make contact with potential service-users. The majority of prostitution related offences are dealt with at Bow Street, Great Marlborough Street and Horseferry Road Magistrates' Courts.

Police Hassle - 13

The streets of the West End are alive with Juvenile Protection Squads, Vice Squads, Beat Officers and Street Offences Squads.

"Pat said he would appreciate some form of outreach support since he's getting so much hassle on the streets. From police and organised protection gangs made up of older working men 21+, both of whom want to move him off their patch".

A number of young men told us the police were overheard referring to them as rampant homosexuals. They told us the police would stop and search them, taking condoms off them, drawing the attention of passers-by and calling HT - high tensile strength, which are safer condoms - 'faggot condoms'. Young men became scared to carry them, some declining our offer of them for this reason. The following extract is taken from the report of a co-worker, Seb Sandys:

"The boys are increasingly worried that if they get stopped, the police are likely to use possession of condoms as evidence of their being on the game".

Consequently the outreach worker requires recognition without identification, particularly where the police are involved. Those of us who work with young people whose activities are criminalised, drug users, sex workers, are faced with a dilemma. We require protection from the police and wish to increase their awareness of our work and it's legitimacy. However, to liaise too closely would create the risk of identifying our clients by their association with us. There must be an appropriate level of liaison between our agencies and the police - from manager to manager - that can effect mutual recognition, respect and understanding, and will not risk further marginalising hard to contact groups by making them even more difficult to contact.

An interesting point arising from this report is where HIV lies in relation to other presenting issues in the lives of these young men. An illness that may undermine their health in years to come has to be seen in terms of the more immediate pressing needs which directly affect both the quality of their lives and personal liberty.

In view of the obvious neglect of general health among the young working men with whom we made contact, both in-centre and outside, a doctor, David Tomlinson agreed to hold a weekly surgery on the premises in June 1989, as it is notoriously difficult for those who are homeless to register with a GP. He wrote recently in New Statesman and Society, "All men involved in selling sex need appropriate medical services..... a substantial number of those at risk face serious multiple problems - sexually transmitted diseases, drug abuse (sic), violence and homelessness - there is an urgent need for services to be developed to target these men more effectively". Health concerns included:

HIV advice/support	(12)
General health problems	(6)
Request for safer sex/drug use advice	(4)
Request for advice on STD (other than HIV)	(2)

Though HIV advice and support comprises half of the health issues in this context, requests for advice were usually of the worried well variety. "I've lost a lot of weight recently, do you think I've got Aids"? (Report 15).

"Kerry, 18, new to London, 2 weeks from Eire where he'd received no information on HIV/Aids. A fortnight in London had taught him that "you can tell who has Aids by looking at them carefully"". (Report 6).

Government propaganda aiming to educate by fear based on Sex = Aids = Death model, had helped to create a climate of fear. When people are scared they don't take much in so we had to approach the issue carefully and allow people first to share their doubts and fears. For many this was an opportunity to relieve their feelings about miserable situations. The price of selling sex to survive suddenly became very high and

survival was not guaranteed.

Aids does not discriminate but HIV seems to thrive in the poorest and most disadvantaged communities, e.g. black/hispanic drug users in the USA. A number of the young men were aware of their HIV positive status though statistics are not available. Many faced added complications, learning difficulties, diabetes, epilepsy, psychiatric problems and homelessness. HIV educational materials, both relevant and understandable, for young people were few and far between. A young homeless man of 16 with learning difficulties who could barely manage his diabetes was diagnosed HIV+ in early 1989. Available written information on 'Living With HIV' by Dr Charles Farthing, talked in terms of seropositivity, totally incomprehensible to the young man.

"Many men have become complacent about Safe Sex - The Aids warning is clearly being ignored" - Society of Health Advisers 1990.

At a time when research points to both a rise in the incidence of HIV among young gay men under 25 in Berlin and San Francisco - World Health Organisation 1990 figures - and an increase in sexually transmitted diseases among men reported at London Clinics, there is a crucial need for keeping the risk reduction message alive through consistent and ongoing outreach work.

4. GENERAL COMMENTS

In the last chapter I briefly discussed the six most common issues presented by the young men we work with and particularly identified where HIV sits in their list of priorities. In concluding this report there are three further points which need to be made.

1. Health issues were identified individually by the young men and were listed accordingly. Had they been combined under a common theme of issues directly affecting the health of young working men, then health concerns would move up to third place on the list after hunger and homelessness.
2. There are three issues which require further comment because they often confound attempts to provide good service responses and involve complex statutory/legal and civil rights issues:

Psychiatric - Young men damaged and invariably chemically dependent following periods spent in psychiatric units for problem adolescents. Young men, feeling suicidal following HIV+ diagnosis, sectioned to psychiatric hospital against their will 'for their own protection'.

Care - Young men reporting victimisation whilst in the care of social services. Three said they had experienced sexual abuse at the hands of social workers or teachers. All who had absconded from care had done so for this reason or because knowledge of their sexuality had provoked violent physical attacks, sometimes in a series of care homes.

Cross Gender - five young men between 16-20 years old expressed either gender confusion or a great need to change sex. Some would actually present and work as women, offering masturbation and oral sex for clients. Services to this group in particular improved through inviting a representative of a cross gender group to discuss issues and needs with staff, so as to increase their awareness and understanding, and establish a referral system to good psychiatric services through the Streetwise

doctor for pre-op counselling, electrolysis and hormone treatment.

These young men often said they preferred to talk with women workers. Hence the importance of having a team that is mixed in terms of gender, race and sexuality in order to offer the widest possible range of support and choice across a spectrum of issues. However working with this particular group revealed a dearth of services, housing in particular, appropriate to their needs.

3. The way in which Streetwise Youth attempts to offer a holistic response to young working men that sees them in terms other than purely their sexual/work practise is reflected in the wide range of issues expressed by the young men we met. Attempting to cover all bases may give the impression of a jack of all trades service. However, I believe that a generic approach that allows individuals to share issues important to them regardless of whether the service can respond or not, is more understanding, potentially supportive and effective than targeting and labelling them as a group based on their sexual/work practice alone. Through this approach they share a lot more of themselves and Outreach is acknowledged as an important service in its own right.

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