

TAKING BACK THE STREETS

*Citizens' responses
to the 2011 riots*

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THE
**CONTEXTUAL
THEOLOGY**
CENTRE



Based in the east end of London, our mission is to equip churches to engage with their communities. We support congregations from a wide range of denominations – helping them to care for their neighbours, to work for social justice and to share their faith. We do this by developing their theological understanding and their capacity to act. We also seek to share good practice, and to give voice to the experience of inner-city churches in wider public debate.

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This is the first in a series of pamphlets the Centre is producing, which will present research findings about the contexts within which the church operates and also about how the church is responding to those. Our aim is to inform churches' reflection on their mission – what it is and how it should be done.

We also publish a separate series of pamphlets – THEOLOGY FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH – which helps churches to reflect theologically on their mission, and to link such reflection to practical action.

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2011, London experienced riots which were quite unprecedented in their scale. More localised rioting had of course occurred before. What was new in 2011 was that for hours (and in some cases for days) the police were unable to keep order in a significant number of neighbourhoods – and many, many more had a justified fear that disorder might spread at any moment. Never before had so many Londoners had direct experience of civil disorder; of streets that no longer felt secure.

Policing a population is only ever possible by consent: with the active participation of the community. The riots highlighted both the fragility of civil society and its vital role in keeping our streets safe. They led many Londoners to a renewed effort to reclaim their streets as places of safety and community.

This report has two parts.

The first asks **what the riots revealed** about the state of civil society in the summer of 2011. Much has already been written about the riots, but this report considers their impact from a unique perspective. It contains testimony from, and describes the practical responses of, religious and civic groups involved in community organising. London Citizens, the capital's community organising alliance, draws together over 250 churches, mosques, synagogues, schools and unions – the 'anchor institutions' in which local people already gather, day by day and week by week.

London Citizens trains and employs professional Community Organisers. Their job is to develop relationships within and between members of these 'anchor institutions.' The Organisers are constantly meetings with local people in order to identify and mentor community leaders – working out with them what are the issues of common concern, and developing an effective community response. They were therefore well placed to hear what local people had to say in the immediate aftermath of the riots, and to work with them to develop an effective response to the underlying issues.

The second part of the report describes some of the **work local people have been doing since the riots to reclaim the streets**

- building the peace and harmony that can only come when there is justice and mutual respect. The listening that went on within London Citizens in the immediate aftermath of the riots was motivated by the desire to understand and then to act. This report describes the action that has been taken, and raises the question of what more can be done, both by local people and by the wider society.

The report draws on three pieces of research:

- Around 4000 conversations instigated by Community Organisers in six London boroughs in the immediate aftermath of the riots. In addition to the regular pattern of 'one to ones' and group meetings which would be going on anyway, these boroughs engaged in a more intensive process of conversation and reflection in response to the riots.
- The *Citizens Inquiry into the Tottenham Riots*, led by nine local commissioners drawn from Haringey religious and civic institutions which gathered testimony from 700 residents in the area of Haringey where the riots began. The report was launched in Tottenham on 7 February 2012 with responses from Rt Hon David Lammy MP and local religious and civic leaders.
- In-depth interviews with community organisers in Newham, Wandsworth and Haringey, Tottenham about the work they have done in the two subsequent years

The report is produced by the **Contextual Theology Centre**. Founded in 2005, and based at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine in Limehouse, the Centre grew out of work done by churches in east London involved in community organising. The practice of organising has helped these congregations to be churches of and not merely *for* the poor. The Centre has produced a range of resources – both on the theology and practice of organising, and on the way organising enables Christians to make a distinctive and constructive contribution to the welfare of the communities in which they live, alongside neighbours of other faiths and of none.



Leon Neal/AFP/Getty Images

1. THE IMMEDIATE IMPACT OF THE RIOTS

This first half of the report draws on the experience of seven community organisers in boroughs in east and south London, and in Tottenham itself. It is the product of a process which engaged over 3700 residents – recording their experience of the riots, their analysis of its underlying causes, and the actions that would need to be taken to address them.

In this section, the organisers recount their conversations with local people (mostly members of churches, mosques and schools involved in London Citizens) and share their own experience of the riots, and their understanding of its causes.

1A. NEWHAM

Emmanuel Gotor

Newham escaped the worst of the rioting. Two areas were hit but no buildings were burnt down. In Stratford Mall, one shop was looted and on East Ham High Street, several shops.

Demographically, Newham is one of the youngest boroughs in London. The Westfield Shopping Centre is bringing thousands of new jobs to Newham.

The surprisingly low number of incidents of rioting in such a young borough may be due to the fact that most young people and their families care about their neighbourhoods and are getting on with the business of trying to improve their lives through education and employment.

In the interviews I conducted after the riots, I learned that faith institutions played a central role in building peace in their neighbourhoods. A significant number of young people I spoke to from a local Pentecostal church were previously gang members. They no longer broke the law because the church had “helped them turn their lives around”. More specifically they were accountable to

TESTIMONY FROM YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE BOROUGH (NAMES WITHHELD):

“EMA [Education Maintenance Allowance] has been cut and education is going to be very expensive from £9000 and there are no jobs. What hope is there?”

“I got a message on BB [BlackBerry Messenger] saying ‘come to Stratford and get free stuff and let’s deal with the Police’. I didn’t go because I am a Christian and my church and my Bible tell me that it is wrong to do the kind of stuff that we’ve seen happening on our streets. I believe I can do better and I believe my community deserves better.”

an adult in the church with whom they had a mentoring, pastoral relationship.

Newham's experience of the riots confirmed the value of the "CitySafe Campaign." It has helped to build resilient relationships between young people, local institutions and the police.

1B. TOWER HAMLETS

Ruhana Ali

The riots did not affect Tower Hamlets as badly as they did neighbouring boroughs – even though levels of deprivation and youth unemployment are similar. The areas that were affected the most were Canary Wharf (some looting of shops) and the Roman Road in Bethnal Green.

There were also small disturbances on the Whitechapel Road, in the area near East London Mosque. At around 10.30pm rioters were making their way from Whitechapel station towards Aldgate creating commotion on Whitechapel Road. (According to the police, many of the rioters had come from outside the Borough but some were local). As it was Ramadan and the mosque was filled with thousands of worshippers attending night prayers a group of 50 – 100 worshippers ran out of the mosque and chased the rioters down the street and away from the neighbourhood. The Mosque received positive coverage from the local press, and praise from community leaders and police, for keeping the area safe. It continued nightly patrols for the next few days in the area.

Many of the leaders said that strong relationships locally between neighbours enabled them to work together and see less damage done to their neighbourhoods. All have a deep concern about building better relationships with young people in the Borough. The riots have made this more of priority.

TESTIMONY FROM CIVIL SOCIETY LEADERS IN THE BOROUGH

Father Tom O'Brien (Catholic Parish of Our Lady of the Assumption, Bethnal Green) was deeply moved by what had happened in the neighbourhood. Fr Tom personally visited all of the shops on Roman Road that had been affected and spoke to the shopkeepers. He and many from the church were involved in the street clean up. He was not surprised that riots had happened in the Roman Road area as there is a lack of facilities for young people – and indeed one of the existing youth clubs had been shut down the previous year.

Jude Padfield (St Paul's Shadwell – Church of England) and Nurul Ullah (Darul Ummah Mosque, Shadwell) had already been heavily involved in London Citizens "CitySafe Campaign," recruiting local shops which committed to 100% reporting of crime and the provision of 'safe havens' for people in immediate fear of violence. In response to the riots, and to reassure local shopkeepers, they organised a "peace rally" in Watney Market with over 100 leaders in the community. Jude and Nurul also organised nightly patrols with a team of 4-5 leaders from the church and the mosque of the market to ensure there was no trouble in the evenings which followed.

1C. HACKNEY AND WALTHAM FOREST

Lina Jamoul

Hackney and Waltham Forest are the parts of East London which were worst affected by the riots. People tended to get into analysis and abstractions too quickly. We encouraged people instead to talk about their own immediate experience.

A parishioner of St George's Catholic Parish, Walthamstow and his

19 year-old son talked about getting to the scenes of the riot 3 hours before the police did. They got to the shopping centre at 10pm to try to quiet things down and tell people to go home - they knew a lot of the kids who were involved. They stayed till 2am, talking to people and telling them to go home. He lives on a local estate very near the church and knows everyone. The 19-year old son talked about being stopped and searched by the police all the time, but then said if his young sister

TESTIMONY FROM SHOP OWNERS AND STAFF IN WALTHAM FOREST:

A recognized some of the looters on CCTV because he'd gone to school with some of them. They ransacked everything – over £140,000 worth of merchandise. He is studying to be an anthropologist. He is in touch with the community police, and says there are a lot of muggings in the area. The shop staff cleaned everything up on the Monday [the rioting was on the Sunday night], and Tuesday they were open. On the Sunday night, A was on the scene from 11pm until 3am. He saw around 80-100 kids running around, some of them with crowbars. They were getting on buses with

looted goods. The police were trying to stop and search groups of young people, but had no control over the situation. From what he could tell there were about 20 police officers on the scene.

B told us that the damage done to his store far outweighed what the looters stole. They stole £14,000 worth of merchandise. The store, however, was damaged a great deal more. All the glass from the outside was broken. It was still boarded up two weeks later. B was very upset, not so much at the theft, but at the damage that was caused. His comment that 'This is like our home' was echoed by all the shopkeepers we interviewed.



goes missing, he'll call the police and he'll want them to be effective.

Another parishioner from St George's talked about her teenage daughter (17 years old) being in Hackney and her telling her daughter to stay put at her friend's house. A few months earlier her daughter had been protesting against the rise in tuition fees and had been kettled by the police for 6 hours. The mother went to the place where her daughter was protesting to try to get her home but the police refused to unkettle the demonstrators - they were all teenagers.

Another Anglican priest from Walthamstow talked about her church opening a 'respite centre' for the police and serving 250 police officer hot meals.

A new team of volunteers emerged who worked at the respite centre.

One of the key London Citizens leaders, who has a 7 year-old son, talked about feeling like she couldn't leave the house for 2 days. More generally, when she drives home after dark – she won't get out of her car unless she calls her husband to come and meet her at the car.

In Hackney, since the riots, we have met with 15 shopkeepers and met with 30 leaders (holding one 'house meeting' with young people from two schools, one training event with young people from the Pembury Estate, and one strategy team meeting with leaders from across Hackney membership). Prior to the riots, London Citizens leaders had been discussing issues of safety and youth opportunities.

At these meetings we heard...

- stories of young people being stopped and searched more than 3 times a week in Hackney Central, sometimes by the same PCSOs.

TESTIMONY FROM A SHOP WORKER IN HACKNEY:

C. was allowed to help out in the shop on Saturday mornings from the age of eleven. He said that if he hadn't received this sort of support from the shop, he would have been one of the rioters. He said these kinds of opportunities would keep young people away from trouble.



- young people saying that they'd really struggled finding work during the summer – only 2 of the 23 young people we met had succeeded. Those who had found work had to share their salaries with siblings and parents.
- teachers expressing anger about the stereotypes in the press – black youths often seem to be the problem and white adults seem to be the ones clearing things up
- young people on the Pembury Estate frustrated that their youth club is only open two nights a week. The rest of the time, they just hang around and get told off by adults.
- shopkeepers say that business in Hackney Central was becoming more and more difficult, despite the fact that the area is becoming more affluent.
- a headteacher mentioned that a youth programme involving 300 kids in the past few summer only had 30 attend this summer, due to funding being cut.
- many parents in Homerton tell us that their kids had never been on holiday.
- elderly people at St Joseph's Hospice say that they're keen to build links with young people in schools.

The key issues which emerged from this process of listening, and which we are taking forward in action are

- employment – especially opportunities for apprenticeships and jobs for young people
- a lack of effective authority – meaning local people feel disempowered and fearful, unable to challenge anti-social behaviour
- in some areas, a lack of trust between police and local communities, aggravated by the way 'stop and search' is practiced.

At the height of the rioting, Fr Rob Wickham, Rector of Hackney, went out on to the streets of his parish with his newly-appointed Area Bishop, the Rt Revd Adrian Newman. In a much-reported incident, they negotiated with rioting young people – securing a brief respite in the disorder to enable ambulance crews to reach an injured pensioner. Fr Rob reflects on the work his parish did with London Citizens in the months which followed:

The riots in Hackney have left an enormous imprint in my mind and heart for many reasons. The events of the riot itself are well documented, but the follow up work, overseen by St John at Hackney, has left a deep impression in a community striving for the Common Good. I will never forget the clean-up operation the following day, with the two minutes of silence in solidarity with those whose lives and businesses had been

affected. Likewise, standing shoulder to shoulder with Hackney's young people, with Church and Civic Leaders, at the public prayer vigil, where the young people gave out white flowers, whilst asking not to be blamed for civil unrest. Then, one week later, to the minute, the same street which was strewn with fire, glass and anger was transformed into a place of dancing, tea, cakes, and pavement art as Hackney's community reclaimed their road once again.

As for the long term, we were inspired to work with London Citizens in the recruitment of over 500 young people to work in the Olympic park, for it is through employment, pastoral care and striving for a fairer society that issues raised by rioting may be properly dealt with.

1D. WANDSWORTH

Jonathan Cox

Clapham Junction is essentially split into two separate bubbles. If you're wealthy you generally send your kids to private school and you relate to people like you on one side of the railway track. Life is very different on

the other side of the line.

Before the riots there was a real need to build relationships across the tracks. The rioting provided a catalyst for such action. In the first instance there was a big clean up act to work on, because the riots had caused large-scale physical damage to shops and buildings in the area. In addition, local organisations began to express a need to be better connected with one another, as they felt the lack of integration was one of the contributory factors to the riots.

TESTIMONY FROM LOCAL LEADERS:

In the listening process, the best analogy local people came up with to describe the riots was that the area was “like a pot that had been simmering away for a while.” On the nights of rioting, “the lid came off”.

Leaders told me “we don’t want to put the lid on again. We want to do something that turns the heat down for good.”

experience was not to be repeated. Together, we committed to holding 2000 one-to-one conversations in Wandsworth, and taking action on the issues which emerged as common concerns.

Twelve local organisations got involved. As well as holding 2000 conversations, the local organising group set themselves a target quota of getting 200 people to a public assembly at the end of a listening campaign – the first Wandsworth Citizens assembly.

It was a “gloriously messy” event. 430 people turned up – more than double the initial target. There was a large turn out from the local housing estates. The agenda – based on the 2000 ‘one to ones’ – addressed very similar issues to Tottenham (see section 1G): relations

In the immediate aftermath of the riots, London Citizens pulled together its key leaders in the borough to reflect and respond. Most of them said ‘we were shocked by the riots, but we are not surprised at all’

The riots showed that the community cannot simply hive off responsibility for its safety to the police. The police seemed powerless. Local leaders realised they would have to take action if this

with the police, youth unemployment, the reputation and condition of the area (in particular, the housing estates and the young people living on them) and a pervasive sense of local powerlessness. The outcomes of the assembly, and the work which has been done since, are described in section 2b of this report.

1E. LEWISHAM

Derron Wallace

The two main areas attacked were Catford and central Lewisham. There was considerable theft in Catford, with a major store, Blockbusters, experiencing the most significant losses. In response to the initial rioting, central Lewisham was placed on 24-hour patrol by the Metropolitan police, in order to limit damage to businesses in and around Lewisham Shopping Centre. As a result, a number of small, family-owned businesses were attacked on the outskirts of the area.

For many of our community leaders in London Citizens, the riots drew them more deeply into action. People were very eager to address some of the root causes of the riots, including unemployment, youth disengagement, and racism.

There was a renewed engagement with young people and their core concerns, especially in religious institutions. Many realised a need

RESPONSE OF A MOSQUE IN LEWISHAM:

When a store was being raided on the outskirts of Lewisham Shopping Centre, one of the store clerks ran to the nearby Mosque. Several brothers came to help ward off the rioters and protect the store owned by an elder in the Muslim community. These Muslim leaders did not attack anyone, but simply stood outside the doors of the store as a force of peace and protection.

to help more young people beyond their own faith tradition, but felt ill-equipped to do so. London Citizens has proven to be one of the best accessible sources for bridging the divides across institutions within the borough.

I believe that much of the rioting can be attributed to youth disengagement. Many of the young people I have had one-to-ones with share this view. It is hard for me to imagine the riots spreading to the extent that they did, if they had happened during the school term, or if most of the young people who have left full-time education had jobs. A number of young people feel particularly disappointed in the political system

I believe, as do many leaders, that the tense historical relationship between the police and urban communities of colour aided the spread

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**IT IS IMPORTANT
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of the riots. The everyday micro-aggressions experienced through ‘stop and search’, for example, ignited a passion to confront the police and sources of authority. Sadly, some saw the riots as their ‘moment to act’.

I believe it is important to pay attention to the “pulse of the streets” and to keep our ears firmly to the ground. The one to ones I had prior to the riots indicated

growing tension in the borough, particularly among young people. I’ve now learned that I must respond creatively to these early signs, by recording them carefully and focusing local actions on addressing these tensions. To be fair, the root causes of the riots are not at all new ones—unemployment, disengagement, racism and so on. Widening the reach and scope of the work in the borough is another necessary step for alerting many more local leaders to positive citizens organising.

I believe civil society is strong in Lewisham. However, it needs to be much more engaged. The example of Lewisham Mosque (see text box) is a fine example of what faith institutions can do in crises. However, this kind of outreach ought to be more consistent. The CitySafe campaign provides a clear, effective structure for doing this.

1F. GREENWICH

Carina Crawford-Rolt

With an estimated 200-strong crowd taking to the streets in Woolwich town centre to riot, the Borough of Greenwich was badly hit, and yet attracted relatively little media coverage. At least five buildings were set on fire leading to two suffering major structural damage, including one of the area’s last remaining pubs. About half of the shops in Woolwich shopping area were looted and many remained closed months afterwards. Rioting also occurred in Eltham, Charlton and Blackheath.

Father Michael Scanlon from St Peters’ Catholic Church was out on the night offering mediation and trying to discourage people from getting involved.

Greenwich is a borough of two halves. Although it was an Olympic Borough (and has become a Royal Borough) some of its eastern areas have among the highest deprivation indices in the whole city. Unemployment in the borough is high, so many lack opportunities. Racism is rife with a high EDL and BNP presence. Gangs have formed in many communities which feel under threat – initially for mutual protection, but subsequently involved in criminal activities themselves. These are all factors which contributed to the riots.

Leaders of Greenwich’s religious and civic groups in London Citizens agree that there was no one clear cause of the riots. Every individual participated in the riots for different reasons. Some rioters may have felt “well if they can do in other areas, we can do it here too.” Others were already behaving in violent, disorderly ways on a small, localised scale – and the riots were simply an extension of this. Some felt the authorities were not listening to them, and this was a way of demonstrating their frustration.

In response to the riots, local leaders have an increasing focus on increasing opportunities for the borough’s young people. This is about more than job creation. Many people feel that the poor housing, lack of opportunities, increased university fees had an impact on young people. While many residents have been motivated to do something and take action however, a significant number of people remain apathetic – they feel there is not a lot to be done and that it is too late.

My own view is that people need to be given much more of a sense

that they are involved in something and that this will benefit them in years to come. They need to feel listened and included in plans to develop and regenerate their area. Young people need to be recognised – so that their voices and perspectives will be engaged with, no matter who they are and where they have come from.

TESTIMONY FROM A YOUNG PERSON INVOLVED IN CITIZENS IN GREENWICH:

As a young boy from Woolwich, I had to grow up fast, keeping one step ahead of the other boys around me. By the time I had turned 14, I had been kicked out of school permanently. I didn't see education as a way of making a name for myself. There were other ways to gain recognition.

Because I wasn't in school, I hung out with the wrong people and chased the wrong opportunities in the wrong places. And because of this I ended up spending 8 months in a youth offenders unit. It wasn't nice inside. Every day I would see other young boys, just like me wasting their lives – intelligent boys, throwing their lives away.

When I was released, I remembered something my grandfather told me when I was young. "Boy – education is the only way forward." With this in mind, I enrolled into college. I had a lot to catch up on. I was petrified that my past would get in my way and prevent me from reaching my full potential. But two years on, I am still in college, and I have almost completed my course. I am one of the lucky ones, but many of the young people around me aren't so lucky... With over 1 million 16-25 year olds out of work in the UK, how can we be optimistic about our future? The schemes which are set up fail to reach those who need it most, those who are turning to drugs and crime, as a way of earning a living. The riots across London were a wake-up call, but will it change anything? Will anyone listen to us?

1G. TOTTENHAM, HARINGEY

Sophie Stephens

In Tottenham – the area where the riots first broke out, London Citizens' response was a more intensive version of that recorded above in east and south London.

A *Citizens' Inquiry* was commissioned by North London Citizens, led by nine local Commissioners (see below) who either lived or worked in Tottenham, supported by a board of advisors and organisers. With funding from Citizens UK and the Contextual Theology Centre (including funding from Westminster Abbey), the Inquiry was launched on October 15th 2011. Over a six-week period, teams of people from local community groups gathered stories from over 700 people from across Tottenham about the causes and impact of the riots and their ideas and solutions for moving forward.

The Commissioners were

- Ajmal Masroor (Imam)
- Fr Bunmi Fagbemi (C of E Area Dean for East Haringey, Vicar of Holy Trinity Church)
- Dawn Ferdinand (Head Teacher of The Willow - formerly Broadwater Farm Primary School)
- Edward Badu (Student, St Ignatius College)
- Hannah Adu (Youth Worker, Highway Youth Club, Bruce Grove Youth Centre)
- Fr Peter Randall (Parish Priest, St. Ignatius Catholic Church)
- Dr Segun Johnson (Pastor, Liberty Church)
- Fr Simon Morris (St Mary's, Landsdowne Road & The Good Shepherd, Mitchley Road)
- Symeon Brown (Co-Founder of Haringey Young People Empowered)

The Inquiry identified four key causes of the rioting which broke out after the death of Mark Duggan in police custody.

1. A BREAKDOWN OF COMMUNITY – POLICE RELATIONSHIPS

In the inquiry, 29% of local respondents blamed police management for the riots in Tottenham, and 23% identified police abuse, including stop and search, as one of the main causes of the riots. Many respondents said that they felt Tottenham had been ‘left to burn’. One young person commented that “the police would never have let this happen to Kensington High Street.”

The Commissioners said “The breakdown of trust and respect was highlighted to us when members of St Mary’s Church told us how they were verbally attacked by other residents for offering food and respite to the police and fire service during the riots.”

2. YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

53.1% of people said unemployment was the key cause of the Tottenham riots, and 32.9% identified poverty as a major cause. While 50% identified ‘opportunism’ as a major reason for the riots, no-one said opportunism or criminality was the sole cause. Rather, these factors

were connected by local people to their being ‘nothing for young people to do’, a ‘lack of values’ or ‘unemployment’

In consequence, 73% of people identified employment or local investment as the key solution for Tottenham to rebuild post-riots. A further 29% of people identified a need for better education and more vocational training for young people.

The Commissioners said,
“When we listened to young people

who chose not to riot, their most important reason was that they had a stake in the community: family and community ties, education and job opportunities. While young people are constantly being persuaded

they need to acquire expensive things in order to have status, too often they are not being offered a decent chance to work and earn. It is in everyone’s interest that people in Tottenham feel that if they work hard, there is a legitimate route to earning money and achieving status.”

3. REPUTATION AND CONDITION OF TOTTENHAM

Respondents named ‘unpleasant high street shops and unpleasant living conditions’ as a key cause of young people not respecting the community. 53% of respondents said the main effect of the riots was fear and the feeling there was a breakdown of trust amongst people, in particular young people, in Tottenham.

The owner of “Peppers and Spice”, which was not attacked after calls on BBM [BlackBerry Messenger] to protect it, said there were not enough businesses in Tottenham owned and run by local people.

56% of respondents identified either regeneration and civic pride (23%) or local investment (33%) as a key solution to the Tottenham riots.

The Commissioners said: “We need to work together to improve the condition and reputation of Tottenham so it becomes a place where successful members of our community stay, a destination for Londoners to visit, live and shop and a place we can all be proud of. This means taking risks and embracing new things. A prosperous future for Tottenham lies in mixed community residential developments and attracting high profile retail chains that will increase footfall and drive the local economy.”

4. POWERLESSNESS

28% of people identified lack of power as a major cause of the riots. A number of respondents spoke of a poor relationship between local communities and “the establishment”. One respondent, echoing the views of many we spoke to, said: “the riots were caused by the arrogance of people in authority, both in local and central government.” Many people also identified a need for stronger community values and local leadership.

47% of people said one important solution would be the opening of new youth projects, and sustaining existing ones (such as the Bruce Grove Youth Centre which faced closure).

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A distinctive feature of the *Citizens' Inquiry* – characteristic of community organising- is that the research was conducted by local leaders, and the policy recommendations addressed religious and civic groups within Tottenham as well as external agencies. Thus, while a number of the conclusions of the inquiry echo (and might indeed have been anticipated by) more academic research, the process itself was one that engaged many hundreds of people in Tottenham in taking responsibility for their area and its future – and helped them build the power to change the area for the better.

Corresponding to the four problems identified in the Inquiry were four proposals for action:

- In response to the **breakdown in Community – Police relationships**, the Commissioners proposed a **long-term campaign to build positive relationships** between the community and police through joint action on street safety and community participation in police training.
- In response to the prevalence of **youth unemployment**, they proposed the **Tottenham 'Working Futures' campaign** - a two-year campaign to create 1,000 new jobs and work opportunities for young people aged 16 – 24 years in Tottenham.
- In response to the issues around the **condition and reputation of Tottenham**, the Commissioners proposed an **'I Love Tottenham' Regeneration Campaign**; a collaborative effort of local communities, Haringey Council, the Greater London Authority and businesses to regenerate Tottenham High Road and improve Tottenham's reputation.
- Finally, in response to the pervasive sense of **powerlessness**, North London Citizens committed itself to **train 100 local leaders** to take forward the proposals in the Inquiry – as part of a wider partnership to make Tottenham a Centre of Excellence for Youth Leadership.

1H. CONCLUSION

What were the factors behind the riots, and what did they reveal about the state of civil society in these London boroughs? The testimonies given in the first part of this report provide a range of answers, but a number of consistent themes surfaced both in Tottenham and in the boroughs to which the riots spread. These include a breakdown in Community–Police relationships and a lack of opportunities for training and work for young people. In each of the boroughs, there was also a more general, pervasive sense of powerlessness.

The testimonies highlight two kinds of powerlessness. Local people explained the destructive exercise of power by the rioters by identifying lack of opportunities for constructive behaviour, and more particularly a lack of opportunity for training and work. While the rioting itself was seen as a product of powerlessness, a different kind of powerlessness was experienced by those giving the testimonies – the feeling that they had been 'abandoned' by the forces they relied upon to keep the peace.

At the heart of the practice of community organising is the desire to build constructive power – 'power with' not 'power over' other people. Churches' participation in organising flows from that same desire. The Christian faith speaks of a God who is both power and love, and who invites us into relationships of mutuality and creativity, not domination and destruction. In the wider Contending Modernities project, the Contextual Theology Centre is producing a number of papers which explore this in more detail (most notably Arabella Milbank's *Organised Christians: A Contextual Sounding*).

The second part of this report focuses on the way that desire has led groups in London Citizens to act in the two years since the riots – to help local people reclaim their power, and their streets.



Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

2: TWO YEARS ON

Two years after the initial listening process, community organisers were interviewed to assess the long-term impact of the riots, and of the process of listening and reflection which had happened in late 2011 and early 2012. We selected three areas: the neighbourhood where the riots began (Tottenham, Haringey), one borough badly affected by their spread (Wandsworth) and one much less seriously affected (Newham)

In all three areas, the CitySafe Campaign was a significant part of London Citizens' response. As it is referred to so heavily in the interviews, we begin with a brief history and description of this project – before recording the organisers' more general account of London Citizens' ongoing response to the riots in their borough.

2A. THE CITYSAFE CAMPAIGN

The CitySafe Campaign website offers the following description of its origins and purpose:

CitySafe is a community response to street crime and violence.

In 2008, after the murder of Jimmy Mizen in Lewisham (the tenth young member of London Citizens to lose their life to street violence in a single year) London Citizens members decided that they needed to act; to develop a campaign to save the lives of young people in the city.

London Citizens' young members complained that when they felt threatened or in danger they didn't feel they had anywhere to turn, and that they were always seen as trouble makers. So London Citizens member organisations decided to work together to establish CitySafe Havens as places where young people would be given refuge whenever they needed it, and crucially that as the young people would be working on this campaign, they would be able to challenge the presumption that they are 'part of the problem'.

London Citizens members set to work, alongside the Mizen family they quickly established the first CitySafe Havens on the road where their son, Jimmy was murdered. The Havens agreed to offer refuge to anyone who needed it and to report 100% of crime. This was soon picked up on by London Citizens members from across the capital who started building CitySafe Havens in their local areas.¹

The campaign is therefore a direct response to the issue of citizens' powerlessness. It draws together three partners who feel particularly vulnerable to violence and disorder: young people in inner-city



neighbourhoods (who are the most common victims of such disorder); shopkeepers and other local businesses (who, in the riots, and in day-to-day life in these areas live with disruption and a lack of security) and the 'anchor institutions' of the neighbourhood – churches, mosques and schools. Such co-ordinated activity enables residents to 'reclaim their streets' – something the Police cannot do on their own (even where Police–Community relationships are good, and Part 1 of this report shows that is not the situation in all boroughs). It reverses the trend, in our increasingly atomised society, to 'contract out' responsibility for one another to paid professionals. CitySafe has developed precisely because local people recognise the need to take responsibility for the well-being of their neighbourhoods. This taking of responsibility inevitably has a corporate dimension: it is organised citizens, working through their 'anchor institutions' who can create a network of relationships and commitments which make individuals confident in taking action to reclaim the streets.

¹ <http://www.citysafe.org.uk/about-3/> accessed 31 August 2013

2B. TESTIMONY FROM COMMUNITY ORGANISERS

(I) TOTTENHAM, HARINGEY

Sophie Stephens

The most significant change since the riots and the *Citizens' Inquiry* is that a large and diverse group of institutions are now working together on a "Citizens Agenda" for the area. This has led to progress on the four issues identified by local people and the Commissioners.

1. COMMUNITY – POLICE RELATIONSHIPS

The Citizens' Inquiry generated a clear work plan, and since the publication of the Commissioners' report (in February 2012), new institutions in Tottenham and across Haringey have become involved in the CitySafe Campaign (see 2a for details of the campaign), establishing "CitySafe Havens" for young people in danger of violence. More generally, they have developed a working relationship with the local police and young people around the campaign.

2. YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

London Citizens held an "Olympic Jobs Fayre" in Tottenham. Hosted in the College of North East London (CONEL) in Tottenham, the Fayre led to 100 young people securing jobs in the Olympics at the London Living Wage.

In addition, local people met business leaders to tackle the "Catch 22" situation in which experience is needed to get a job, and yet only jobs provide the necessary experiences. The event was organised and led by young people in London Citizens in and around Tottenham, all of whom got placements in various different industries. This has provided a model for community and business engagement which is being replicated in other boroughs.

3. CONDITION AND REPUTATION OF TOTTENHAM

The face of Tottenham has not been changed, as yet, in a substantial way – but a longer-term strategy for regeneration is developing. The

Greater London Authority has now opened a Social Enterprise Hub on Tottenham High Road, as part of £20 million of new spending on the areas affected by the riots. This is providing support and desk space to people who want to start social enterprises in Haringey.

4. POWERLESSNESS

London Citizens has trained the 100 leaders it pledged to as part of its response to the Inquiry. The successful, if often modest, actions – on campaigns such as CitySafe, Olympic Jobs Fayres and apprenticeships for young people – is beginning to give local people the sense that, when diverse institutions commit to working together in a sustained and patient way, real change is possible.

The experience of community organising is that, from such modest successes, a more powerful alliance is generated – because these successes build more trust between communities, and also generate greater confidence that action can lead to genuine change.

This has put local groups in a stronger position to negotiate with Tottenham FC, to shape a major new development in the area, which is expected to generate around 6000 jobs. London Citizens has secured a meeting with the Head of Community Relations at the club, and their work on the issue is being led by two schools in different parts of the borough, so that young people in Tottenham have a powerful voice in the regeneration process.

(II) WANDSWORTH

Jonathan Cox and Imogen Moore

Through its 430-person Accountability Assembly, Wandsworth Citizens sought to build relationships with council leaders, police and local employers around the agenda of concerns which had emerged through its listening campaign

Power and powerlessness has been the central issue in Wandsworth, and addressing this root problem has enabled other issues to be tackled more effectively. It is only when local people feel they have power that they can take responsibility for their area, and tackle the other issues of concern. The building of "Wandsworth Citizens" as a

strong, local broad-based alliance has been the key task – and success – in the two years following the riots.

Wandsworth Citizens has grown through developing relationships with the Peoples' Organisations, formed of Residents' Associations on each housing estate - alongside the churches, mosques, schools and unions which are already at the heart of London Citizens'. The riots have enabled a new form of micro-organising to be pioneered, at the level of the local housing estate and Wandsworth Citizens have gone door-to-door on the housing estates to identify residents with the ability and appetite to be grassroots leaders.

The riots were also a catalyst for other 'anchor institutions' to start organising – including schools, Roehampton University, local Church of England, Catholic and Baptist churches, and an Ethiopian congregation.

The listening campaign, assembly, and ongoing process of community organising have led on to a series of substantive changes:

- On the Surrey lane estate, Wandsworth Citizens negotiated with the developer building a new school, ensuring that **50% of jobs will go to local people**
- Clapham Junction is now a **CitySafe Zone**, with many shops and businesses signed up as "CitySafe Havens" (see 2a for more details of what this involves). 150 people were involved in making this happen – including the local MP – and a "Family Fun Day" was held to launch the new zone, and further increase local awareness.
- While relationships with the council remain limited, it has responded to specific demands (e.g. refurbishing particular housing blocks, and also requests for specific changes to make the area safer – see the text box below for one example)

Engaging young people in the process has been absolutely central. London Citizens' CitySafe Campaign is led by young people – who are in fact most likely to be the victims of violent crime.

CitySafe enables young leaders to be identified, usually through the schools and congregations in London Citizens – and in Wandsworth, through the process of door-to-door engagement on housing estates. The campaign provides a framework for developing relationships with local shops and businesses and with the Metropolitan Police. This has proved particularly successful in Wandsworth, with a group of young

leaders emerging who had not previously participated in civic action – and building a constructive relationship with the Borough Commander of the police.

The identification and development of young leaders in Wandsworth was greatly helped by a Church Urban Fund grant, which enabled Imogen Moore to be employed as a Community Organiser working specifically with young people. Her work included organising a 100-person Youth Assembly, and mentoring young people to play a key role in the main, 430-person assembly.

Engaging young people actually led to the involvement of new

TESTIMONY FROM A YOUNG PERSON INVOLVED IN CITIZENS IN GREENWICH:

D, a Zimbabwean leader, went to talk to a gang of young men in a park as part of the listening campaign. They were saying it's all terrible here. 'Dangerous, violent etc...' As they were in conversation, a vehicle came past and shot a bullet into this group. D ran off. They shot again, and one boy was hit. He survived but had to be taken away. After this, it was very tense on the estate. There were lots more stories which came up about challenges for families after this. With one of London Citizens' Community

Organisers, D went to meet with the young man who was shot.

In response to the shooting, local leaders identified the alleyway which the car had driven down as one which needed to be blocked off. If there a barrier had been in place, the shooting would not have happened. The council's initial reaction was that it might be three months before this could be done. When Wandsworth Citizens leaders warned that it would come and campaign at the council offices, the process was sped up considerably. The barriers were put up within a fortnight.



organisations to which they were attached. This in turn has enabled Wandsworth Citizens to engage groups which are otherwise often hard to reach. For example, one Somali women's organisation called ELAAYS are now leading a "Mother Tongue Campaign" (a campaign to get examination bodies to recognise languages such as Somali in their curriculums).

(III) NEWHAM

Emmanuel Gotoru

Although the riots did not hit Newham heavily, they increased awareness of the need to invest in young people. London Citizens' response to the riots was integrated into their wider platform of concerns. Emmanuel Gotoru says that "the work that we did has definitely been shaped by the riots because of the increased concern amongst the police and local people about the lack of opportunities for young people. We focused on campaigns to divert the energy of young people from crime and violence, and help them to focus on jobs and earning a Living Wage."

Jobs for Young People: Having secured a commitment from the Olympic Delivery Agency that all jobs on the Park would be paid a 'Living Wage,' London Citizens embarked on a major recruitment drive to get young people to work at the Olympics. Young people did not like the atmosphere in the existing jobs centres. London Citizens held "Olympic Jobs Fayres" in Newham and in other east London boroughs, turned local institutions into jobs centres. London Citizens' local leaders identified and mentored young people in their churches, schools and mosques to apply for work. 88% of the local people who were interviewed in Newham secured jobs during the Olympics – a total of 1000 workers.

The CitySafe Campaign: London Citizens has been building closer relationships with the police in Newham, and across the capital since the riots. It has intensified its "CitySafe Campaign," which works with local shops and businesses to create "Safe Havens" for young people in immediate danger of violence, and to commit to the 100% reporting of crime. The vision of this campaign is to reverse the spiral of decline,

where residents and businesses feel powerless to protect their streets, and create a 'virtuous spiral' where local people and institutions have the confidence to act together to create a safer neighbourhood.

The evidence from "CitySafe Zones" in other boroughs, and from similar campaigns in other UK cities, is that this kind of organised community action can lead to dramatic reductions in crime levels – and to positive relationships between the police and the local community.

To address the frequent episodes of low-level crime and anti-social behaviour in particular areas of Newham, London Citizens set up a 'CitySafe Zone' in June 2012, around Woodgrange Road and Stratford Shopping Centre. The CitySafe and Jobs campaign have formed an integrated response to the issues behind youth offending. The police have referred some of the young people they know to have been repeat offenders into London Citizens' "Jobs Fayres," and testimony from local shopkeepers indicates that where troublemakers have found work, crime has declined dramatically.

AFTERWORD

The political narrative around Britain's poorest communities has acquired a harder edge, and opinion polling suggests that there has been a similar hardening in public attitudes. The language of 'scroungers' and 'shirkers' is increasingly deployed to suggest that Britain's poor are responsible for their condition.

This report speaks of a very different reality. It describes local citizens of all ages who are actively taking responsibility for their lives and for their neighbourhoods – citizens who recognise that the safety and wellbeing of their streets requires their active involvement.

The report also reveals the inevitable limits of that communal action. London Citizens' campaigns rightly begin with local people. But their impact is greatest when they receive the active engagement and support of local and national government.

All too often in political debate, our poorest neighbourhoods are talked about, and not talked with. This is true on left and right alike: they are treated either as worthy recipients of the state's largesse or as the focus of blame and disapproval; as 'scroungers' and 'shirkers.' This report suggests a change of perspective is urgently needed. The people worst affected by the riots have a vital contribution to make – both to the debate about what the riots meant, and to the actions that will enable their streets to be reclaimed as places of safety and community.

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CONTENDING MODERNITIES

This booklet draws on research which was conducted as part of the Contending Modernities initiative. Based at the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, Contending Modernities is a global research and education initiative focused on collaboration among secular and religious universities, institutions and leaders. There is more information on this initiative at **contendingmodernities.nd.edu**

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