

Social entrepreneurs' response to the UK riots

Findings from a survey of UnLtd Award Winners, August 2011

About the survey

- A survey was sent out to current UnLtd Award Winners on 10 August 2011, to find out how social entrepreneurs were responding to the UK riots
- The survey was completed by 131 social entrepreneurs (approximately 13% of current UnLtd Award Winners)

Who responded?

Responses suggest that the majority of people who filled in the survey were community entrepreneurs, providing services that aimed to address a social need. Many were geographically focused and/or targeted towards a particular group.

68 respondents (52% of those who answered this question) said they were working in an area that had been affected by the riots that took place between 6 and 9 August 2011.

Respondents were working on a wide range of issues, with a strong focus on young people's opportunities and young people's inclusion.

Are you working to tackle any of the following issues that have been cited as possible root causes of the riots? Please tick all that apply, even if you are not working in areas that have been affected by riots.

	Percent	Number
Youth employment, aspirations and opportunities	60.2%	50
Young people's exclusion from mainstream society/belonging	55.4%	46
Socio-economic deprivation	42.2%	35
Parenting/family fragmentation	36.1%	30
Filling gaps in public services as a result of budget cuts	31.3%	26
Gangs/gang culture	22.9%	19
Community relations with police/criminal justice system	22.9%	19
Race relations	20.5%	17
Consumer culture	18.1%	15
Inter-generational tensions	15.7%	13
	Answered question	83
	Skipped question	48

How does social entrepreneurs' work help to tackle possible root causes of the riots?

This was an open question, which 92 respondents answered.

The vast majority saw themselves as working either directly to address issues that might have contributed to the riots (e.g. providing positive activities for young people) or doing so indirectly (e.g. contributing to community wellbeing more generally, for example through providing access to healthy food).

Responses suggested that the key contributions that social entrepreneurs make, that other types of service might not, include:

- **Innovation** – there were lots of examples of how social entrepreneurs were trying different techniques and approaches to tackle persistent social problems
- **Multi-disciplinary approaches** - linked to the above, social entrepreneurs often brought skills, techniques, expertise learnt in one context and applied it to another
- **Authenticity** - several social entrepreneurs stressed how their personal experience of issues that might be related to the riots helped them connect with the types of people who were involved
- **Being embedded in the community** - several described themselves as leading grass-roots organisations that had support and trust from the communities they worked within

Are you doing anything directly to address the riots?

This was an open question, to which 72 people responded. Out of these, 30 social entrepreneurs (42% of the people who answered this question) were **already doing something to respond to the issues raised by the riots** directly.

Examples included organising additional activities to bring communities together or as diversionary activities for young people, meeting with community members informally or setting up more formal networks or consultation groups, media work – one Award Winner had even recorded a track with local young people.

“I've been organising impromptu football sessions, one at Stoke Newington Common and one at a Clissold Park for local kids to keep them busy and their minds off of what's going on.”

“I have dedicated a radio show to the follow up after the riots using a religious angle to appeal for calm.”

“We are holding special 'Sock Mob' walks, where we walk out on the streets of London to meet and spend quality time with the homeless, giving socks to break the ice and generally being a positive 'gang', created to lift spirits, give people vital resources and information, and carve out new opportunities with them such as our 'Unseen Tours' led by homeless guides.”

“We are establishing a network of leaders to speak coherently on behalf of young people. We have also produced a video response and a blog.”

“There is a track that was made in response to the riots... A video is also being made to go with the track.”

“I went to the local communities to talk to some young adults and tried to understand their perspectives. To my surprise, some of them presented me quite impressive analysis and understanding of what’s happening on the streets. We do think we should give these young people more opportunities to express themselves, not only when we see the crisis on the streets but on a more daily basis. And please don’t underestimate their ability and capacity to do something positive and constructive; they need an enabling and supportive environment to grow up.”

What holds people back from doing more?

This was an open question. Unsurprisingly, the majority (58 out of 89 responses to this question, 65%) mentioned **revenue funding and/or access to capital investment** as a key factor holding them back from doing more.

There were a number of other issues that were frequently mentioned, including:

- **Capacity/staff resources**, with specific issues including being able to devote enough time to their venture; managing a volunteer workforce; having access to appropriate advisors or pro-bono support; being able to make time for marketing, fundraising and other non-frontline activities
- **Relationships with local partners**, e.g. local authorities, police & schools. Some social entrepreneurs struggled to form positive relationships with these organisations, as funders but also as partners in delivery. Some felt that they were not taken seriously and their value not recognised
- **Mindsets** and attitudes of beneficiaries and local community members
- **Other issues** mentioned by one or two respondents included access to contacts, access to supply chain, red tape e.g. around public sector procurement

What would you want to say to government?

This was an open question with 90 responses.

Respondents clearly came from a range of political viewpoints and had different views on the causes of the riots, but there were some strong themes in the responses:

- Focus on **including young people** and giving them a stake in society
- **Listen** to young people and start a dialogue with young people and communities
- **Invest** in services for young people and/or communities more widely
- **Understand** the causes of the riots, and don’t jump to conclusions or focus only on tackling the effects
- **Don’t judge/categorise** young people or tar them all with the same brush
- **Set good examples/highlight role models**

Some people made policy suggestions (e.g. bring back EMA or Future Jobs Fund) but the majority simply stressed the need to understand what had caused the riots and **respond positively**. Several mentioned the ‘punitive’ message in current policies (e.g. around

benefits/welfare) as unhelpful and a few mentioned the need to demonstrate 'fairness' (e.g. in taxation policy). A couple advocated strong sentencing and 'zero tolerance' but others felt this would not work; some suggested restorative justice would be more effective. Several suggested investing in community enterprises and helping people to set up their own local projects.

"This "deficits mentality" only focuses on eliminating "problems and difficulties" without address the strengths, competencies and assets that already exist in young people, their families and communities"

"We need to be careful not to make sweeping statements. Punishment obviously plays a part in how we deal with those involved but punishment alone merely serves to interrupt behaviour not treat it."

"Young people need to be inspired again, to have a passion for something that will motivate them and excite them, whether this is a job, a hobby or an interest. UnLtd and social enterprises like Handprint theatre cannot always help with changing or offering solutions to difficult home lives but we can provide opportunities for young people to be a part of something."

"Offer more financially supported opportunities to members of disadvantaged communities to develop socially inspired enterprise initiatives. Develop more and closer/meaningful (learning/paid internship) relationships with existing social enterprises and corporate businesses to the benefit of members of disadvantaged communities."

"I've been here before from Ladywood in the 1970s onwards (which did directly affect me). The issues then, those Scarman spoke about, are with us — plus some. We can hand-wring again, or build on the opportunity Tariq Jahan gave us all . . ."

We would like to thank all the Award Winners who took the time to complete this survey.