



# REDUCING YOUTH VIOLENCE: THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY GROUPS

2017 saw the the biggest year-on-year rise in reported knife crime, with a 22% increase across England and Wales. More worryingly, an increasing percentage of the victims were children aged 16 and under. <sup>1</sup>

The rise in youth violence has seen for growing calls for the government to adopt a 'Public Health approach', focusing on longer-term prevention and a holistic and collaborative approach to tackling the root causes of the problems.

Community groups have long played an integral part, not only in prevention, but also when it comes to picking up the pieces and dealing with the consequences when tragedy strikes.

**Drawing on the insight and experience of Sported's members, this short report aims to highlight the importance of community groups in reducing youth violence and promote further support to sustain this vital work.**



64

people have been fatally  
stabbed or shot in  
London this year<sup>2</sup>

22%

increase in recorded knife  
or sharp instrument  
offences<sup>3</sup>

40%

of knife possession  
offenders were persistently  
absent from school<sup>4</sup>

83%

of knife possession  
offenders were eligible  
for free school meals<sup>5</sup>



## EXPERT VIEW: George Turner, Chief Executive, Carney's Community

“ Much of the media attention on youth violence is focused on gangs which frustrates me. Yes, there is a gang element to it, but the wider public needs to understand it impacts everyone. Because of the greater perceived risk – in the media and online - young people are carrying knives to protect themselves. We have had five participants murdered in the last 14 months and none of them were ever identified as gang members.

### Needs a long-term approach

What many people fail to understand is that you can't fix it in the short-term. It's a very long-term issue caused by years and years of people feeling marginalised and excluded.

If you look at the young people committing these offences and stabbings, many of them would have been educated in Pupil Referral Units - that's not necessarily blaming them; if anything it's blaming the education system and schools who are excluding them too quickly. Excluding them means they go to Pupil Referral Units where they get only a few hours of education a day and are only associating with other people who have been excluded from school, making them feel even more marginalised.

Being marginalised increases the risk of stabbings, because if you're angry with society, you're not going to feel like you've got anything to live or fight for. So you're more than happy to go out and put your own and other people's lives at risk.



### Youth violence is a mental health issue

Feeling excluded and marginalised has a massive impact on your emotional and mental health, especially as a young person. One of the things we regularly see is a pattern of growing up in a household of domestic abuse. Witnessing and being victim to domestic abuse has a huge impact on a person's well-being. It's traumatic, especially as a child when your brain is still developing. When that stress manifests itself in the hormones in your brain, it stops you from being able to rationalise and think properly about the consequences.

### Importance of positive role models

These problems are confounded if you don't have access to positive activities with positive role models who are able to demonstrate that violence and abuse is not the norm. We need to provide some real options and real access to opportunities for these young people. Most importantly, they don't have the family and friends to vent to, who can give them advice

around how to deal with difficult situations and conflict in the work place.

### The need for holistic support

Getting them into a job is part of the journey, but more aftercare is needed to help them maintain that job. Yes, that support should come from the families, but the reality is we've got many families who are not capable of giving that support. Whether it's because they were poorly parented themselves or because they are under so much stress and pressure to maintain the family and bring in money to pay the bills and put food on the table, they are not able to offer the level of support needed.

Whilst we want parents to work, equally we want them to be parents to their children. When you've got broken families that makes it very difficult. Even when you've got parents who want to do the right thing, it's getting them to find that right balance.

### Treat the causes

Knife crime is a symptom of many things. It's the same risk factors that are related to extremism, substance misuse and all sorts of other social problems. Rather than fight these symptoms, we need to be focusing on the causes and recognise that they need a long-term response.

**Carney's Community in Battersea, is a charity using boxing and mentoring to turn around the lives of disadvantaged young people.**  
[www.carneyscommunity.org](http://www.carneyscommunity.org)



# MEMBER SUCCESS STORIES

## The United Estates of Wythenshawe

Wythenshawe is one of the largest and most deprived council housing estates in Europe, and suffers from high levels of unemployment, crime and poverty.



The United Estates of Wythenshawe was founded to provide local solutions to local problems, such as anti-social behaviour and youth violence. The community centre is home to a number of social enterprises, including a professional gym, a dance and performing arts studio, sound recording suites and therapy rooms.

### Secrets of success

“We recognise the importance of identifying and engaging with real local leaders who give access and **open lines of communication to the real hard-to-reach youth gangs**. Combining these two social groups offers massive energy, creative genius, local knowledge and positive direction. We have tapped into the energy and creativity that is needed to produce and develop a street gang, and have used it to build a youth club for kids that don’t go to youth clubs. This in turn provides a platform, **converting that energy from ‘gang culture’ into positive social and community enterprise**.

We are **entirely staffed by local people**. We have our ear to the ground and - all be it on an informal level - have become **experts in gang intervention and conflict resolution** – more out of necessity than desire. The beauty of being local is that we are both responsive and reflective of real local needs.”

**Greg Davis, Founder of United Estates of Wythenshawe**

## Birmingham Community Development Scheme

Residents of the Highgate, St Andrew, Digbeth and Lee Bank areas of Birmingham have lived under a cloud of fear and intimidation in recent years, as their communities have become plagued by escalating gang-related violence and anti-social behaviour.

Embedded in the heart of these communities, Birmingham Community Development Scheme (BCDS) is a social enterprise whose aim is to tackle the root causes of these problems by deterring young people away from gang-related crimes, whilst empowering them to understand, challenge and change their attitudes.

### Secrets of success

The group uses structured sporting activities, including netball, basketball, table tennis, football and cricket, to divert young people away from gang activities. These activities are accompanied by one-to-one, group and peer mentoring to give young people the opportunity to speak confidently and openly about their issues and problems.

“The biggest thing facing young people is boredom and no facilities. When people don’t have anything to do, they are going to get into trouble. So we use sport to get these young people out of those bad situations and help them to channel their energy into something more positive.”

**Clifton Cameron, CEO at BCDS**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

1

## **Build the capacity of established community organisations and programmes through long-term support and funding**

Community groups with established local support networks, trusted local staff and existing infrastructure are key to early intervention and prevention. Specifically, engaging and educating the most hard-to-reach and marginalised young people, at highest-risk of offending. Public spending cuts have hit these - predominantly small-scale and volunteer-led - community organisations hard, therefore support is needed to help them access alternative funding streams and promote local collaboration to reduce competition for the same, limited funding pots.

2

## **Tackle underlying mental and emotional health issues**

Alongside the mental health benefits of physical activity, community sport groups offer young people the opportunity to open-up and express themselves in a safe and non-judgmental environment, whether through structured counselling or more informal support or peer mentoring. Community groups should receive further support, training and resources to build upon this work and aid the identification and treatment of underlying mental health issues in vulnerable young people.

3

## **Create alternative pathways into employment, education or training**

Community groups help young people - particularly those that have been excluded - build better futures for themselves through the provision of accessible alternative education and employment opportunities, and by diverting them away from possible gang, criminal and anti-social activities. Helping to raise aspirations, broaden horizons and challenge social norms. Community groups should be supported to launch and run holistic programmes which offer opportunities to gain qualifications and accreditations, build employability skills and foster connections with local employers.



## Helping community groups survive, to help young people thrive.

Sported is one of the leading Sport for Development charities in the UK, helping more than 3,000 community sport and youth groups survive and thrive.

What makes Sported's members so special is that each and every one uses the power of sport to transform the lives of young lives and local communities. Yet the majority are run on shoestring budgets, relying on the kindness and hard-work of a handful of dedicated staff and volunteers.

At Sported we support these amazing groups by providing much needed professional expertise, resources and business mentoring to help build their capacity and long-term sustainability. Helping to ensure the young people who could benefit most, can continue to access their vital support.

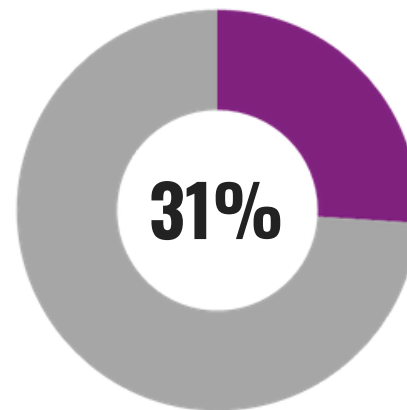
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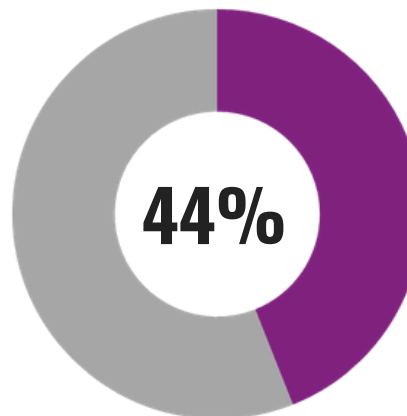
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# SPORTED MEMBERS

WE SUPPORT **3,086** COMMUNITY SPORT AND YOUTH GROUPS ACROSS THE UK



**801** Sported members use sport & physical activity to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour



**1,363** Sported members are located in the **30%** most deprived areas of the UK