

'Gang Asbos' won't work – ex-offender

BY GLENN MCMAHON

glenn.mcmahon@archant.co.uk

A FORMER gang member has said government plans to break up gangs through injunctions will not work.

The 15-year-old, who did not want to be named, was referred to Dodd Prescott, at Potential Mentoring, Unity Centre, Church Road, Willesden, by social services after serving time in a youth offenders institute for aggravated burglary.

The organisation gives tailored support to young people who have fallen, or are at risk of falling, into crime.

Following a three-month programme, the 15-year-old boy is focusing on improving his life through regular visits to the gym, healthier eating and working towards getting a place at college.

And he says it is this care and guidance from someone he has come to respect that has given him the confidence to break away from his former life.

He said: "You get tired of living the same life. One year I just decided to get away – enough is enough. It's not difficult to do if your mind is focused.

"If I go to college I can get a job, whereas my friends will still be doing robberies, selling drugs or in jail."

But he dismissed the idea of ASBOs or the new gang injunctions – which can restrict the movements of someone suspected of gang involvement and stop them wearing certain gang-related colours – solving the root problem.

He said: "They give ASBOs for people being in gangs but the police aren't always there to stop people being on the street. People will just change their schedules.

"You can't stop it unless you put police on every street corner at every minute of the day."

Mr Prescott said: "The new gang ASBO is not going to work. He needed someone who could relate to where he was coming from but redirect his mind into something else he wanted to do but didn't know how."

Yet despite its success in helping young people reform, the service is at risk of closing as social services cut back on referrals due to budgetary constraints.

Kelly Oyebola, director at Potential Mentoring, said: "When the coalition came in I lost so much work. It's a really difficult time, but the work we have done has been very positive. When we think what we have saved social services..."

Mary Arnold, lead member for children and families at Brent Council, said she supports the work of organisations like Potential Mentoring but the drop in referrals is a consequence of government cuts that are already impacting on community services.

A Department for Communities and Local Government spokesman said: "The government has delivered a tough but fair settlement ensuring the most vulnerable communities were protected. If councils share back-office services, join forces to procure, cut out the non-jobs and root out the over-spends then they can protect frontline services."

Petchey Award for Matthew, 14



Matthew Chan, 14

A TALENTED youngster from Brent was among the 56 winners who were presented with prestigious Jack Petchey Achievement Awards at an annual ceremony at the Beck Theatre in Hayes.

The event honoured achievements among 11 to 25-year-olds who have been nominated throughout the year by their peers for a variety of achievements.

Award winners included Matthew Chan, 14, from St Michael's Youth Project in Hillside, Stonebridge, who was singled out for praise after he raised £100 in a playathon and promoting the project.

The awards scheme provides funding of £4,800 each year to St Michael's Youth Project.

Re-think on cuts to charity cash

LONDON COUNCILS has been forced to reassess plans to cut funding to dozens of charities and voluntary sector organisations following a judicial review.

London's 33 local authorities voted to cut funding by 80 per cent, terminating grants mid-contract affecting the Tricycle Theatre, in Kilburn High Road, Kilburn, and The Minster Centre, in Lonsdale Road, Queen's Park, amongst others.

But the affected bodies challenged the consultation process and LCs must now assess the impact changes to the scheme will have on equalities.

Crime novelist visits library

AN AWARD-WINNING Scandinavian crime novelist will drop in at Willesden Green Library to talk about his work.

Gunnar Staalesen has written more than 20 crime novels, with 15 of them featuring protagonist and private-eye anti-hero Varg Veum.

Gunnar will visit the library, in High Road, Willesden, between 7pm and 9pm on March 3 as part of Scandinavian Crime Month.



Dodd Prescott and Kelly Oyebola, of Potential Mentoring, help youths away from crime

Fight against building on gardens lost

RESIDENTS have lost their battle to prevent a developer building six houses on gardens overlooking their homes.

Fabian Sharp, of Brondesbury Park, rallied home-owners to oppose the "garden-grabbing" plans at 63 Christchurch Avenue, Brondesbury Park, which Brent Council passed at committee last week.

The phenomenon of building property in back gardens has attracted widespread criticism, and the coalition government has announced plans to tighten planning regulations.

Mr Sharp said: "We are worried if private landlords are allowed to build houses in their garden, it sets a precedent and we could lose the character of the neighbourhood. Houses benefit from having a garden between them."

However Mr Sharp said challenging planning applications is a lost cause after the planning officer and his ward councillor and planning committee member Mark Cummins failed to respond to his concerns.

The council also received £63,000 from the developer to help mitigate the impact of the development – called a Section 106 agreement.

He said: "From the moment the developers were prepared to offer the council a financial



Abdelhak Assifer, Cllr Carol Shaw and Fabian Sharp

incentive our campaign was lost.

"We are led to believe we can enter into the discussion but we have effectively been sidelined. It leaves residents feeling utterly powerless."

Cllr Carol Shaw (Lib Dem: Brondes Pk) who attended the planning committee meeting on February 2 criticised the way Mr Sharp was treated the meeting and wants to see the £63,000 benefit the area.

She said: "It was terrible. The reason tenants don't come to these meetings is because they feel intimidated and are excluded from the process.

Cllr Mark Cummins said: "As a member of the planning committee we're expected to be very careful about whom we discuss planning applications with, to ensure everything is above board."

Mark Pander, of architects PAD in Kilburn who designed the development, defended the plans.

He said: "The proposal makes efficient use of an otherwise underused site which proposes six temporary houses that will undoubtedly improve the streetscene. The proposal respects the existing building line on Christchurch Avenue, not only on the street frontage but also at the rear."