

# STANDING UP TO GANGS

## THE RISE OF GANGS IN LONDON RAISES TWO QUESTIONS: WHY IS IT HAPPENING? HOW CAN THE PROBLEM BE SOLVED?

BEFORE YOU READ:

When you think of a gang, what comes to mind?  
Why do you think people join gangs?**Discuss it!**What do you think is happening in this CCTV footage?  
What do you think is going to happen next?

### “HOW GANGS CHANGED ME” ONE EX-GANG MEMBER’S STORY

I had a very supportive\* mum and was brought up in the right way,” says Claude Murray. “But I looked at the older boys in the school and they had lots of money and designer clothes. And they got that through crime, so I followed – it was peer pressure, I suppose.”

Raised by a single parent, Murray thinks the lack of a male role model

may have speeded his path from a bright student to a gang member. And many experts who study gangs think that gang leaders fulfil the role of a ‘father’ to younger boys.

#### FOOTBALL

“I was a really good footballer and had trials\* lined up with lots of clubs,” says Claude. But at the age of 15 he was expelled\* from school after a fight with another gang. “When I was expelled, playing football ended.” Without the routine of school, Claude filled his time hanging out with his gang and breaking

“I always knew the difference between right and wrong. But I just ignored it.”

the law. At 16, he was jailed for two years for robbery. “I didn’t actually use a gun, although I knew people who did. When you watch people shooting on TV, it just seems normal.”

#### CHANGE

The death of a close friend due to gang violence made Claude change his life. “I thought, ‘That could be me; things have got to change.’” Murray now works as a mentor\* for young people. “I always knew the difference between right and wrong, but just ignored\* it,” he explains.

#### CRISIS

Claude was lucky – he got out of gangs. But some young people don’t get a second chance. A spate\* of gang violence in London killed seven under-18-year-olds last spring alone. The number of teenage gangs has grown recently in the UK – almost half of those charged\* with gun murder in London in 2006 were teenagers. Now the government and local communities are urgently trying to solve the crisis.

### UNDERSTANDING GANGS

#### WHAT’S A GANG?

A gang is a group of teens and young adults that hang out together and are often involved in illegal activity. “Crime is an essential part of the group’s identity,” says University of Leicester expert Kate Broadhurst.

#### WHY DO PEOPLE JOIN GANGS?

Many experts think that young people join gangs as a result of social problems. These problems include single parent families and negative role models like rap stars who glamorise guns and violence. Henry Bonsu, a presenter\* on Colourful Radio, a talk station for London’s black community,

says his listeners believe the problem is complex: “Some young people say that they have nothing to do. Others say that their parents haven’t shown them leadership.”

#### HOW VIOLENT ARE GANGS?

Gang members are very likely to own a gun, and they are 60 times more likely to be killed than the average teen. Violence between rival\* gangs is common. “There’s a general consensus\* that there are links between gangs, guns and drugs,” says expert Kate Broadhurst.

#### WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT DOING TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM?

The British Government has introduced new laws to fight gun crime and gangs,

including a five-year prison sentence for anyone under 18 caught with an illegal gun. Schools have banned clothing associated with gangs, such as hooded tops, wristbands and baseball caps.

Many schemes have started in communities throughout the UK. A south London group “From Boyhood to Manhood” provides yoga and martial arts classes for school drop-outs\*. “Lots of boys want a way out of gangs,” says the project adviser Janu Seshmi.

#### DOES RISING GANG VIOLENCE MEAN LONDON ISN’T SAFE?

No. Gun crime and crime has decreased in London, with gun crime falling by 14% in 2006. Gang crime is usually aimed at other gangs.



Girls in London mourn\* the death of a schoolfriend by gang violence.

#### \*GLOSSARY

**supportive (adj)** – giving help and encouragement • **football trials (n)** – series of tests for young people to enter a professional football team • **expel (v)** – force to leave • **mentor (n)** – a person who gives advice over a long time • **ignore (v)** – to not pay attention • **spate (n)** – an unusually large number of events, especially unwanted ones, happening at about the same time • **charge (v)** – formally accuse of a crime • **presenter (n)** – someone who introduces a television or radio show • **rival (n)** – competitor • **consensus (n)** – a generally accepted opinion • **drop-out (n)** – someone who leaves school before the school-leaving age • **mourn (v)** – feel sadness because of someone’s death