Scotland launches initiative to counter Glasgow's gang culture

A £5m plan to tackle gangs in Glasgow's East End has been launched by Scotland’s national Violence Reduction Unit. The Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV) has been 18 months in the planning and is based on the Boston Ceasefire project.

With £1.6m over two years coming from the Scottish Government and a further £3.4m funding provided in services and in kind, the initiative brings together partners from justice, government, community safety services, housing, careers, education, social work, health and the community to tackle the long standing problem of gang violence in one of Glasgow's hardest hit areas.

The initiative works by treating the gang as a unit rather than as individuals and using the gang themselves to address their own behaviour. Following intelligence gathering, gang members are approached by CIRV street level workers with the offer of help to find an alternative to the gang lifestyle. They are then invited to voluntarily attend a self-referral session.

Groups of different gangs are brought in to attend a carefully scripted meeting (the self-referral session) where they are addressed by a senior police officer, an A&E consultant, members of their community and the parent of a victim, among others. The senior officer assures the gang members that they will all leave the meeting, but that if any of them – including members not present – commits an assault/murder, they will pursue the whole group, not just the individual. This has the effect of pushing gangs to police their own behaviour.

The gang members are then given the freephone number of a "one stop shop" where they are given help to access education, health services, careers advice, social services and diversion if they want to turn their lives around. Self-referral sessions are repeated as and when necessary and the intervention is supported by thorough intelligence gathering and operational activity. Over 150 gang members attended the first two self-referral sessions, held at Glasgow Sheriff's Court on October 24. To date some 63 have taken up the offer of help, with more coming forward every day.

If the project is a success, it will be rolled out to other areas of the city.

“Our message is clear,” said Detective Chief Inspector Andy McKay, who heads up the initiative for The Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) "The violence must stop. We have drawn on the Boston and Cincinnati models for CIRV. However, we would never take on an initiative wholesale – just because something works in the States does not mean it will automatically work here. That's why we have spent the past few months refining the initiative to fit the situation in Glasgow, work that will be ongoing as the initiative moves forward.”

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