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## 'We know that boys as young as eight are involved'; Summit reveals battle to help troubled youths; BACKGROUND

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ONE of the best-known deterrents to street **violence** is rain, and it was pouring on the day of Glasgow's first gang summit. However, despite the weather some 150 young people were brought from their homes in the east end to the sheriff court.

Stevie, 16, was one of them. First in trouble with the police at the age of 10, it wasn't long before he was expelled from school and gang fighting became the default option.

His mother had said she feared she could no longer control him and that he would soon end up badly injured, behind bars or dead.

When he was visited by two of the dedicated street advocates involved in the new Community Initiative to Reduce **Violence** (CIRV), he says he was reticent about getting involved in any kind of meeting. Eventually he agreed on the grounds that he, like the 149 other boys who took part, would be escorted to and from the sheriff court - across the gang boundaries that prevent so many young men from walking freely in the city.

He says that after the summit on October 24 he was surprised and moved by the testimony of those who had lost relatives to gang fights. He says he realised he didn't want his mother to end up feeling the same way.

"I thought it was going to be sh\*\*\* but actually it was f\*\*\*\*\* brilliant," he says, summing up the views of others involved.

"I didn't realise how much it affected other people."

Afterwards he rang the freephone telephone number and is now involved with a series of diversionary activities. As a result he has befriended some of the gang members he used to fight against.

His story is similar to those of the 60 other young men, aged between 12 and 26, who voluntarily took part and then

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signed a contract with CIRV agreeing to abstain from **violence** and carrying weapons .

It is part of a radical new initiative from the **Violence** Reduction Unit to "do things differently".

Research has shown that around 51per cent of young people in Glasgow consider themselves to be part of a gang. Despite successive crackdowns on knife-carrying, in Strathclyde alone police catch around 5000 people with blades every year.

The new initiative was inspired by a similar programme in Boston, Massachusetts. Under Operation Ceasefire the message was delivered to gang members that **violence** had to stop or the full weight of the law enforcement and criminal justice systems would be used.

Following the initiative, the US city saw a 71per cent decrease in homicides by persons ages 24 and under, and a 70per cent reduction in gun assaults.

Officers have significantly modified the work of Ceasefire to ensure it is applicable to Scotland . The CIRV, which is now focused on Glasgow's east end, will ultimately be rolled out around the city.

"We have already had the first two summit meetings and I think it will take another six to eight to capture all the boys in the east end, " said Detective Chief Inspector Andy McKay, head of the initiative.

"We estimate that will cover 600 to 700 boys in the east but in addition we are also looking at doing two similar pieces of work with parents and younger siblings. We have drawn the line at 12 at the moment but we need to be realistic and know that boys as young as eight are involved.

"The session itself was emotional for all those who were there. A significant number have contacted us just because one of the speakers got through to them."

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