Community leadership approaches to tackling street crime

Jenny Lynn

A review of whether the approaches taken to tackling street crime by a social enterprise in Manchester might be relevant to similar neighbourhoods in other areas.

The United Estates of Wythenshawe (UEW) group in South Manchester is tackling street crime through its work with young people in Benchill, one of the UK's most deprived wards. By converting a disused church into a community centre with a gym and many other activities, the group now has a base from which to work with young people. This study reviews their work in sharing their approaches with similar neighbourhoods in the Midlands and the North of England.

The report reviews:

- the context in which UEW was set up, including the changing face of the Wythenshawe estate in South Manchester, growing concern about a culture of criminality that was becoming embedded in parts of the neighbourhood, and how UEW grew over the years to be what it is today;
- what happened when UEW began to reach out to groups in other parts of the country, to see if the approach taken in Wythenshawe might be relevant to what they were trying to achieve in their neighbourhoods;
- key lessons from the project, and suggestions for how policy-makers and practitioners could do more to harness the commitment and energy already in evidence in deprived communities.

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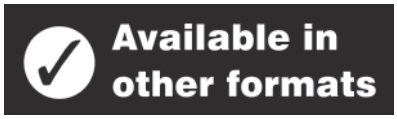

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Introduction

Over the past few years, concern has grown among policy-makers that, despite the best efforts of regeneration professionals and the criminal justice system, many neighbourhoods across the UK continue to suffer from the effects of a subculture of criminality and anti-social behaviour that is proving hard to transform. Indeed, 2007 saw an escalation of media interest in the subject following a series of gun-related incidents, many of which involved children and young people as both victims and perpetrators. Concerns were expressed about the levels of alcohol-fuelled violence, particularly at weekends, as well as the extent to which drug dealing was now perceived as endemic in some neighbourhoods. The extract below, taken at random from the daily posting on the Greater Manchester Police website for 10 September 2007, gives something of the flavour:

> Detectives are appealing for information after a man was attacked with a knife during a disturbance with youths in Wythenshawe.
>
> At about 1am on Saturday 8 September 2007, police were called to Northcote Avenue following reports of people fighting in the street. On arrival, officers found that a house had been damaged after a brick had been thrown through the windows. The occupants of the house had gone outside to speak with a group of hooded teenage boys and girls when they were attacked. A 26-year-old occupant was left with serious cuts to his arms and was taken to hospital for treatment.

Yet, it is in these very neighbourhoods that some of the most exciting and innovative work is to be found, as the people who live there try to come up with ways of countering this negativity and creating authentic alternatives to the prevailing culture of violence and criminality.

This report follows the fortunes of one such initiative, a social enterprise in South Manchester called the United Estates of Wythenshawe (UEW), as it began to explore whether its approach might be relevant to similar neighbourhoods in other parts of the country.

The roots of the project go back to 2005 when the United Estates of Wythenshawe had approached the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), which had invited it to speak about its work at one of the regular networking events within the JRF Neighbourhood Programme. A short scoping report outlining how the United Estates of Wythenshawe had been developed was undertaken in the spring of 2006 and

JRF then agreed to commission a more extensive piece of work, which looked in depth at the experience of UEW. JRF emphasises across all of its programmes the importance of capturing the voices of real people living in difficult circumstances or tough neighbourhoods. It was therefore felt to be important to use a partnership approach that would encourage people from UEW to speak openly and honestly about what they thought they were up against, what they had already achieved and what they believed would help to strengthen their work in the future.

It was agreed to use the informal, 'light-touch' facilitation methods that had proved so effective in this respect in the JRF Neighbourhood Programme. The project with UEW could then explore a number of questions raised by the initial scoping study. What if the 'regeneration sector' were to develop greater sympathy for work of this kind, and were able to support it without stifling its freedom and creativity? What if energies similar to those of UEW could be identified and unleashed in other regeneration neighbourhoods? What if UEW itself developed the skills to promote its approach in other areas?

The practical aims of the project were defined initially as helping UEW to:

- develop promotional materials that explained its approach;
- invite neighbourhoods, funders and regeneration managers to attend 'Seeing is Believing' visits in Wythenshawe;
- establish a mentoring role with a number of other neighbourhoods.

Over a twelve-month period from September 2006, supported by a JRF facilitator, UEW made contact with a small number of like-minded groups in neighbourhoods in Nottingham, Sheffield, Liverpool and Greater Manchester, and engaged in a series of exchange visits and advice sessions. As the year progressed, the project evolved and shifted shape, until eventually it culminated in an event that had not even been envisaged when the project had been conceived initially – a two-day conference entitled Street Peace 2007. This brought together 50 people from across the Midlands and North of England, and laid the foundations of what could become a national network of self-help organisations engaged in transforming the culture of their estates and neighbourhoods.

It is hoped that this report will provide fresh perspectives on the ways in which people in some of the neighbourhoods most affected by criminality are determined to tackle some of the issues for themselves, and that it will contribute to the ongoing policy debates about how best to tackle the underlying causes of youth crime and gang culture.

Over the past five years, a series of government policies and initiatives have attempted to get to grips with these issues.

- 2003 saw the launch of the Together campaign, which focused on enforcement powers in relation to the more serious end of anti-social behaviour and disorder, with penalty notices, dispersal orders and acceptable behaviour contracts, in addition to Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs).

- In 2006, the Government developed this approach further, with the launch of its Respect Action Plan. This recognised that, as well as enforcement, there was a need to take a broader approach, which focused on the causes of anti-social behaviour. It argued that lack of respect for others is a major social justice issue, with people on low income who live in social housing or inner cities being far more likely to see themselves as suffering from anti-social behaviour than people living in wealthier areas. The Plan called for action to be taken on a variety of fronts, including activities for children and young people, improving behaviour and attendance in schools, new approaches to dealing with 'challenging' families and improvements to the criminal justice system.

- Building on this work, by 2007, government action on youth crime encompassed a range of themes, which were being taken forward across several departments:
  - preventing crime and anti-social behaviour (establishing a youth task force; requiring local authorities to promote intensive family support projects; expanding the range of positive activities available to young people; reviewing the effects of violence in the media, etc.);
  - working with schools (offering guidance and training on tackling gang culture; accelerating the Extended Schools programme in priority areas; exploring the expansion of 'safer schools' partnerships, etc.);
  - alcohol and drugs (development of a new alcohol strategy; prioritising young people and families in the drugs strategy; alcohol enforcement campaign; promotional campaigns such as FRANK, etc.);
  - enforcement in tackling guns and violent crime (high-visibility policing; targeting prolific offenders; tackling the supply of firearms; campaigns to change attitudes to knife carrying, etc.).

In 2008, the Government is committed to launching a new Youth Crime Action Plan, which is expected to focus on four priority areas: crime prevention; dealing more effectively with offending; tackling serious violence; and addressing victimisation. In the Cabinet Office, Louise Casey is heading up a Crime and Communities review. At the same time, in the broader area of citizen engagement and community empowerment, Government has been discussing a community anchors programme,

has instituted the Commission on Unclaimed Assets, is supporting the Community Alliance, and seems likely to do more on asset transfer to community organisations.

In addition, a small number of voluntary and community-based organisations have begun to play a role in this area, particularly in relation to providing positive alternatives to young people at risk of being drawn into criminality or gangs. Examples include the youth organisation Leap, with its focus on developing young people's understanding of the living processes of conflict resolution and mediation, and Boyhood to Manhood, which works with boys from the black community.

This report suggests that the pool of such organisations with the potential to work transformatively with young people from their own neighbourhoods and communities might be greater than we think – the challenge for government and statutory agencies is to develop these alliances in a way that is mutually supportive and does not endanger the very credibility that enables them to reach out and influence young people in the first place.

The report is structured as follows.

Chapter 1 looks at the context in which UEW was set up (the changing face of the Wythenshawe estate in South Manchester – growing concern about a culture of criminality that was becoming embedded in parts of the neighbourhood) and tells the story of how UEW grew over the years to be what it is today.

Chapter 2 looks at what happened when UEW began to reach out to groups in other parts of the country, to see if the approach taken in Wythenshawe might be relevant to what they were trying to achieve in their neighbourhoods.

Part-way through this year-long process, the leader of UEW, Greg Davis, came up with the idea of getting a few like-minded groups together from across the country to share their experiences and ideas about trying to transform behaviour on their estates, and to send out some key messages to policy-makers – a kind of manifesto from the streets. Chapter 3 looks at how this event – Street Peace 2007 – was organised and at the exciting range of work being undertaken by the 50 activists who came together for two very exhilarating days in Manchester in September 2007.

Chapter 4 draws out key lessons from the year-long project, and suggests ways in which policy-makers and practitioners could do more to harness the commitment and energy already in evidence in some of our most embattled communities.

1 UEW – a credible alternative to street-corner culture?

The Wythenshawe estate was described as the largest garden estate in Europe when it was first built during the 1920s. It lies some five miles south of the centre of Manchester, not far from Manchester Airport. Its spacious layout, ample green space and tree-lined streets at first made it one of the more desirable places to move to for people leaving the overcrowded conditions of inner-city Manchester. However, like many other estates across the UK, by the 1980s and 1990s a series of social and economic problems, such as low educational attainment, youth unemployment, drugs and crime, were seriously undermining the previously positive image of the area.

By the mid-1990s Manchester City Council had begun to put in place a major programme of regeneration investment in the area. Led by the Wythenshawe Regeneration Partnership, this achieved significant improvements in housing and the environment, as well as trying to develop new ways to link local people to the expanding job opportunities on offer around the airport.

More recently, Manchester City Council's Wythenshawe Regeneration Team engaged its key partners in a twelve month research and consultation process, which led to the production of the 2004 Wythenshawe Strategic Regeneration Framework. From the perspective of key partners such as the City Council, substantial progress has already been made in relation to these objectives. Economic and social regeneration was further boosted by a £7 million SRB programme, and the local Willow Park Housing Trust has been engaged on a £90 million investment programme to upgrade the housing stock in the area. Meanwhile a major refurbishment exercise at the Wythenshawe Forum created a large, state of the art leisure centre.

However, while in many ways life was getting better for most of the residents of Wythenshawe, for some people, on some parts of the estate, the effects of drug- and alcohol-related criminal and violent behaviour continued to disrupt the neighbourhood.

United Estates of Wythenshawe – UEW for short – is a lively, unconventional social enterprise that was set up in a vandalised Methodist church by local people who were determined to do something to tackle this culture of violence and anti-social behaviour.

With little money, but lots of energy and commitment, over the past ten years it has succeeded in creating a real hive of activity, an alternative with 'street cred' for young people for whom 'it's cool to be bad'. There is a fully equipped gymnasium, with a membership running into hundreds whose fees help pay for the running costs of the project, a dance studio, community café, security business and half a dozen other micro-enterprises set up by local people who have been encouraged to believe that they could realise their ambitions with encouragement and support from the project.

The story of how all of this came about began back in 1996 at the Methodist Church on Broadoak Road in Wythenshawe. Built in 1934 as the first religious outpost on the new estate, the church consisted of two good-sized halls and a number of smaller rooms, which over the years became home to a variety of religious and community activities. By the mid-1990s, however, the dwindling congregation at the Broadoak Road Church, like many other churches across the country, was facing the aggravation of mounting repair bills and a growing catalogue of nuisance and vandalism to the building and its grounds. They began to consider whether closure and retrenchment might be the only sensible solution.

Faced with the prospect of losing a local church that had been an important part of his growing up, one of the congregation, Greg Davis, approached the church in 1996 and offered to take on a lease for the building. He was not sure whether it would be possible to find ways to make use of the building that would help tackle some of the problems facing local families – like the lack of places to go for parents and toddlers, or the more critical problem of what to do about the growing number of young people in the area who were going off the rails and getting drawn into violent and anti-social behaviour – but he was determined to have a go.

Greg remembered the way he had been motivated, as a youth, by attending the gym run by Tommy Langstaff, now the landlord of one of the pubs in the area. What if they could use the church to do something similar – create a gym that would attract some of the youngsters who wouldn't dream of going anywhere near an official youth club, but might think it was cool to get involved in something that had the official seal of approval from the small number of people they both feared and respected on the estate? It might also help to put the word around that, from now on, this was a building that the yobs who enjoyed a spot of wrecking things would have to leave alone and instead could channel their energy into 'creative vandalism', i.e. creating a gym that they felt they owned.

Tommy Langstaff in the gym. Photo: Jenny Lynn.

So Greg set about getting Tommy and some of the other 'local leaders' together in the building, just to talk about what they could do to it, what it would take to turn it into a decent gym. Wives and girlfriends came along too, and got talking among themselves about how they would like to use some of the space to start running a parent and toddlers' group. They decorated one of the rooms and before long were running a couple of informal toddler sessions there twice a week.

During 1996–97, the group set to work to raise the money for materials and to make a start on properly renovating and improving the main hall (unused for over seven years), so as to create the gym. With money in short supply, and needing to make sure that local youngsters would not trash the place once it had been converted, they gradually persuaded some of the hard nuts among them – children who had been truanting maybe or who had been in trouble with the police – to get involved in helping with the physical work on the building. Climbing the scaffolding to vandalise it, the children instead found themselves helping to do the place up.

By 1998, the gym was getting well used. Over the next two or three years, the group started to think about how they could expand the facilities and eventually came up with plans for a mezzanine second floor, which could provide some space especially for women who wanted to work out. The Community Technical Aid Centre was approached for support with plans, etc. The group also did lots of fund-raising, including securing a grant from the Single Regeneration Budget scheme then under way in Wythenshawe, plus approaching various trusts for sponsorship.

Getting the locals involved. Photo: UEW.

Again, they got local youngsters to help with the work, and they also managed to get hold of some funding to help use the project as a practical building skills course, which was validated by Manchester College of Arts and Technology (MANCAT). Some of the adult gym users with building skills gave their time for free in return for free use of the gym, which they managed to keep open throughout the various stages of the building work. They were able to turn this necessity into a virtue because, as people saw the work in progress, they began to come up with ideas and suggestions, many of which were eventually incorporated into the new floor. Greg stresses that one of UEW's real strengths has always been the way it has grown and developed 'organically', allowing people space and opportunity to contribute their ideas as they went along.

Next they were to turn their attentions to the outside of the building and, over the following two years, they creating a landscaped garden with a fountain and built on a new conservatory entrance, which gave added space to the café area. They were especially proud of this area, as the first reaction of people they asked for funding was that it would never work because it was bound to get vandalised right away. So the conservatory and garden provided a way of rebutting this pessimism and saying that people in Wythenshawe liked a quality environment around them too.

With the gym well established and drawing in local people, UEW found itself becoming a focus for people dropping in with ideas of other things that they wanted to do.

Someone had qualified in therapeutic massage but had nowhere to practise; a couple of other women were qualified hairdressers and came for advice about where they could go to find premises. In both cases, UEW was able to adapt some space in the gym and offer them somewhere to make a start on their businesses until they had the confidence and resources to get premises of their own.

The church second-hand clothes shop, which had operated on a very low-key, occasional basis from one of the small rooms in the church, was rehoused in a new Portakabin with a more visible location at the front of the building. Opening regularly on three days a week, it soon began to attract more customers and interested volunteers.

Some of these operations were fast becoming significant enterprises in their own right. The UEW security business, run by a friend and colleague of Greg's, Lenny Robinson, has managed to win a number of contracts to look after public buildings in the area, thanks in part to its reputation for understanding the local culture and commanding respect. In the words of one public sector manager, 'they take a tough line, and the local kids understand that'.

Greg Davis with Michelle and Joey from the Therapy Centre.

The range of sporting and social activities undertaken by UEW has grown too over the years. One of the UEW management team members, Jimmy McCullough, runs several local football teams that now involve over 100 people. Jimmy Kelly is the senior boxing coach who also runs the increasingly popular UEW Stingers basketball team. The gym is now home to a Saturday street dance group, Jazzy J. Led by a local resident, it has performed at the renowned Lowry Centre. The local Irish dancing group also uses the building to practise in every week.

Under the umbrella of the Copperdale Trust, a local charity established 30 years ago to provide supportive accommodation for young, single, homeless people, Greg has developed the social concern side of UEW. The Copperdale Trust is one of nine partner organisations across the UK that help redistribute surplus food from companies in the food industry to groups supporting vulnerable people in the community under the auspices of national charity, FareShare. Greg manages the Manchester FareShare operation, which has succeeded in providing alternative employment to eight local youngsters who might otherwise have found it difficult to get into any kind of work.

Why has UEW worked?

At the heart of UEW's success has been the way that it has tried always to work with the grain of the local culture in Wythenshawe. A handbook produced by UEW in 2006 entitled *Inner City Culture Centre* offered a three-step description of how it got going.

Jazzy J and the Saturday dancers. Photo: Anthony Spencer, UEW.

1. Identify and make contact with the *real* local estate leaders.

2. Discover and identify the source of *real* community problems – the hard to reach.

3. Combine the 'street cred' and the persuasive influence of the local estate leaders with the energy of the hard to reach to create UEW.

Reflecting on the story of UEW, a number of critical success factors can be discerned.

- Visionary leadership, born out of disenchantment with the way things were, and a determination to 'make Wythenshawe a place where people have genuine opportunities to better themselves'.

- A strong faith base among some of the founding group and a church that was willing to take some risks because it saw no other alternative.

- An inner circle of people who knew and respected each other.

- An opportunity waiting to be seized in the form of a redundant building crying out for a change of use.

- A return to 'cultural roots' – creating a down-to-earth atmosphere that played well with traditional working-class (and predominantly male) interests like bodybuilding, fitness, boxing, etc.

- An empathy with young people on the margins of society because their experience contained echoes of what some of the group had been through themselves when they were young.

- The use of a range of other sports, dance and music to 'bring down the barriers' and widen the appeal.

- An atmosphere that is inclusive and welcoming, even to the most marginalised (e.g. people with mental health or drugs issues).

- A confident, entrepreneurial approach – the result, in Greg's case, of several years spent setting up and growing a successful club door security business in Manchester – with everything expected to 'pay its way' as a result.

- A willingness to hustle for 'finance without strings' and find allies outside the mainstream government-funded regeneration programmes – e.g. small grants from private sector trusts and community-focused charitable organisations, plus a £20,000 social entrepreneur revenue grant from the Community Foundation for Greater Manchester to support Greg's work in helping UEW becoming fully self-sufficient.

- A developing reputation as an informal 'enterprise hub' – somewhere that will give you a chance if you have an idea that you want to try out.

Carl's car wash gets going in the car park. Photo: Anthony Spencer, UEW.

2 UEW spreads its wings

Ten years after taking that first step of getting hold of the church building and pulling people together to work out what to do with it, UEW wanted to spread its wings – to see whether its way of working might ring bells in other working-class neighbourhoods like its own. It had already started to become known beyond Wythenshawe, not least among national politicians interested in why criminality seemed to have become so entrenched in some neighbourhoods. The partnership with JRF was to enable it to move beyond giving the occasional inspirational speech and to learn about what would be involved in developing an ongoing supportive relationship with other neighbourhoods like its own.

The first stage of exploring the relevance of UEW to other neighbourhoods facing similar challenges was to identify individuals and organisations that might welcome the opportunity to broaden their horizons by learning about how UEW did things on its estate.

The process of putting the word out about this learning opportunity began informally during the summer of 2006 when Greg was one of three speakers at a well-attended workshop on alternative approaches to diverting young people from crime, which was held at the National Regeneration Convention in Coventry.

In September, Greg and I sat down to scope out a work plan for the project. We agreed that the first stage would be for us to identify up to three potential neighbourhoods with which UEW could work and then carry out a scoping visit to each one. The aim of these visits would be for Greg to learn about the neighbourhoods – what their hopes, ideas and problems were – then to come back and try to assess what he had learnt from these visits about the needs of each neighbourhood and how UEW could tailor a programme that would suit them.

It was agreed to restrict the search to the Midlands and the North of England because of the practicalities of arranging visits in a single day. We were looking for places that had similar levels of disaffection and alienation among young people, but where we could track down an existing group of people who might be interested in the sort of things that UEW had achieved.

Using both of our networks, during October and November, we contacted people by phone or in person in a number of locations, including Nottingham, Birmingham, Sheffield, Liverpool, Trafford and Manchester itself, to talk through what might be involved, pass on information about UEW and, if they were still interested, arrange for a first scoping visit by Greg.

Eventually, it was agreed to begin work with organisations based in the following four areas:

- the Broxtowe Estate in Nottingham;
- the Stubbin Estate in Sheffield;
- Moss Side in Manchester;
- North Liverpool.

The first two areas are former council estates, which are very similar in appearance and feel to Wythenshawe, and where the UEW approach might be expected to have real resonance. Moss Side was included in the programme because key people from the area liked what UEW was doing and felt that it might help them take forward similar social enterprise initiatives there. The CIB (Criminal Information Bureau) in Liverpool was interested in how UEW was able to reach out to young people who had got involved in criminality, and wondered whether something similar could be set up in parts of North Liverpool where gun crime and drugs were becoming major concerns.

Broxtowe Partnership, Nottingham

The Broxtowe Estate lies three miles north-west of the centre of the city of Nottingham. Built by the City Council during the 1930s, the estate's 2,000 homes are arranged along a series of circular roads, with a large roundabout called Denton Green in the centre divided by four main access roads. During the 1980s, supported by the newly formed Broxtowe Forum, work began on refurbishing the estate and a community centre was built in the middle of Denton Green. The 1990s saw growing concerns about the behaviour of young people on the estate, as in Wythenshawe, and a Broxtowe Development Group was set up to push for more comprehensive regeneration of the area. This culminated in securing Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding for a series of social and economic projects, and the establishment of the Broxtowe Partnership Trust.

The Partnership has a small staff based in a pair of converted semi-detached houses on Denton Green, overlooking the high-security fencing that now encloses the community centre in the middle of the roundabout. Prompted by local young people who were complaining that there was nothing to do on the estate, the Partnership

had recently recruited one of the young men well-known in the area to help it get an independent youth night going in the community centre. Over a period of six to nine months, the group had managed to get funding for music and DJ equipment at the centre, organise paintballing trips and grow the numbers of young people coming along to the sessions every Thursday night to around 120.

The idea of developing links with an organisation like UEW, which seemed to be operating in an area that faced very similar problems, was welcomed by the Partnership as an opportunity to help broaden people's horizons in the FutureForm group and perhaps get them to think about where they might want to go for the next stage of their development.

Stubbin Estate, Sheffield

Stubbin Estate lies approximately five miles to the north of the centre of Sheffield and is home to about 3,000 people. Eighty per cent of the houses belong to Sheffield Homes, and the remainder are split between North British Housing Association and the private sector. The estate's layout is similar to Broxtowe, with roads arranged in concentric circles, which give quite an inward-looking feel to the neighbourhood.

The Stubbin Neighbourhood Association was set up in 2004 to try to address long-standing local frustrations about crime, drug use and services that were seen as not very responsive to local people's views. Run by a voluntary committee of local people, it has a base in the small community centre in the middle of the estate and managed to get two or three years' European funding, up to March 2007, to enable it to employ a full-time development worker and part-time administrator. The group also became a member of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme, which helped it to broaden its horizons through exchange visits with other neighbourhood organisations. Its development worker, Sylvana Mansell, believed passionately that local people like herself who understood the culture of the estate and were not afraid to tackle issues head on needed to take control and persuade the council and other services to work with them. She liked what she heard about UEW's style of working and persuaded the group that it would be worthwhile seeing what it could learn from the UEW experience.

Moss Side, Manchester

The Moss Side district of Manchester lies one mile south of the city centre – a patchwork of terraced streets and housing estates, which is bisected by the main Princess Parkway road that heads south towards Wythenshawe and Manchester airport. For years it has struggled to overcome its reputation as a hotspot for crime and drugs, and a succession of time-limited government initiatives have tried to tackle the economic and social problems affecting the area. One of the strengths of Moss Side has been its strong sense of community and, over the years, a number of initiatives have been set up by local people to promote positive values and counteract the pull of criminality in the area. UEW had begun to develop links with some of these groups and individuals following a much publicised murder in the area. Eventually, one of the most prominent of these groups, CARISMA (Community Alliance for Renewal, Inner South Manchester Area), was to approach UEW for help in taking forward its plans to buy and develop a centre in a church-owned building in the area.

CIB, Liverpool

The final connection was with a group called CIB, which was based in the centre of Liverpool. CIB (Criminal Information Bureau) had been set up in 2005 by Bob Croxton while he was in prison. He had created the business plan for his idea of a website and agency that would provide information, advice and support for prisoners and ex-prisoners and their families. The focus of CIB was on rehabilitation support for ex-prisoners and intervention work to stop young people going down the wrong road. CIB has developed links with legal aid solicitors and other legal advisers on a nationwide basis.

Aware of the serious issues facing areas in North Liverpool like Croxteth and Norris Green, Bob felt that setting up something like UEW could be part of the solution to the increasing levels of drug-fuelled violence and anti-social behaviour on the estates there.

Building relationships

The first and arguably most crucial stage in testing out the relevance of UEW's experience to other areas was to establish a relationship of trust between the groups.

Over a period of several months, Greg and one or two members of the management team took time out from running the UEW gym to make a series of visits to each of the groups we had identified.

The main aim was to get to know each other and then check out the extent to which the groups could relate to each other's view of the world.

The meetings were very informal – no agenda, no minutes, no one chairing the meeting. Typically most sessions started over a cup of coffee with a swapping of histories of each other's projects, then lots and lots of storytelling.

The stories were about how working-class neighbourhoods had changed as drugs and booze had taken more and more of a hold, and about how young people didn't seem to care about anyone or anything, but instead enjoyed feeling that people were scared of them – how, in Greg's words, 'It's cool to be bad'. Stories too of trying to get help from conventional authority sources – the police, the council – and how often the response came too little, too late or not at all.

Sometimes the stories were about a do-it-yourself response to the kinds of situations that just seem to erupt on estates from time to time. How people had stood up to local criminals and bullies – had told them that they weren't going to have it all their own way, or had got them to hand back the stolen bike or car. At other times it was about acting as a go-between, trying to sort things out between one gang and another before situations escalated into serious trouble.

All of the people Greg met shared a common commitment to trying to transform the outlook for young people in their neighbourhoods – getting them to see that life could be different and better for them if they stayed away from crime and drugs. For some people, this came out of direct personal experience – they themselves had gone down the wrong road when younger and now wanted to try to stop young people making the same mistakes that they had made. So there were stories of how they had come up with ideas, often starting from small beginnings – an outing somewhere, a summer scheme for the kids, a dream about a quad-biking circuit in the local park, a building that they could take over and turn into somewhere special for people to go.

At some stage, there would often be stories of what happened when the people with these ideas tried to connect with the authorities (which might take the form of the local council, or the police, or some external regeneration body that was also trying to turn things round in the area).

One of the groups was already seen as an established community-led partnership. It had been active on the estate for years and the people involved prided themselves on knowing who was who and what might work. They were able to use council-owned premises and get some support from local authority youth services, but even they still had not succeeded in persuading the council to hand them real control and ownership of the centre on their estate.

Another group told stories of how they did feel that they controlled their own community centre, thanks to a sympathetic response from the housing association that owned it – but that did not stop them feeling that they had to fight their corner when it came to being included and having a say in the local area management arrangements that their council had put in place.

Some of the stories shared were about how regeneration programmes and physical improvements had happened on their estate. But how, often, the authorities had let the criminals and vandals feel they had won by turning every public building into a kind of fortress, complete with cameras and high-specification security fence. So breaching the fortress, wrecking the latest new investment in the area had come to be seen as a challenge, some kind of perverted badge of honour, like an electronic tag or an ASBO. What they wanted was help in putting back some kind of pride into the neighbourhood, making young people feel part of the place, not like outsiders with no stake in it at all.

These stories reinforced a sense that most people in these groups felt they had a stronger grasp on the reality of life on their estates than many of the statutory authorities that were responsible for delivering services there. However, perhaps not surprisingly, often they felt that they were viewed with suspicion because of their tough backgrounds or criminal past.

So, perversely, they also felt at times as if they were the ones on the outside being told how their neighbourhood needed to change by people who rarely lived there and whose primary loyalty was to the organisation that employed them, rather than to the neighbourhoods in which they might spend a few hours each week.

Moving to the next stage – visits and exchanges

Once people had got to know each other and decided that they wanted to learn more about how UEW operated, the next stage was to arrange for each group to visit Wythenshawe. Greg had used each initial visit as a chance to scope out the kinds of

things that the group might be particularly interested in and to try to arrange for key people to be around for them to meet during their visit.

The programme for the visits would be informal, with a welcome and a cup of coffee first, followed by a tour round the building and a chance to talk about how it had developed and changed over the years. UEW tried to emphasise all the time that the essence of the building was getting things to pay for themselves, i.e. being entrepreneurial rather than constantly expecting grants that never materialised. Making a small charge for activities creates a series of income streams for the organisation, and creates pride in people too. So the gym fees go into a pot to pay running costs and to help support new initiatives or sponsor local children's activities like school trips and football strips.

For groups from outside Manchester, the programme might also include a drive around the estate, so that people could get an impression of how Wythenshawe compared with their home area. It was also a chance to contrast the high-security features to be seen around many public buildings in the area with the open, welcoming appearance of the gym – a testimony to the fact that local young people saw it as theirs, and respected Greg and the team sufficiently not to vandalise it.

After lunch, Greg would lead the group through a presentation that he had prepared. This began by outlining the UEW business model of a number of activities that all helped to sustain the organisation. Then he got people to think about who the hard-to-reach young people really are, before moving on to think about who are the real street leaders in their neighbourhood. He talked about the sort of people they had got

UEW Fun Day. Photo: UEW.

involved in their management team – people running what he described as working-class kinds of businesses, such as a pub landlord, a taxi company owner, a security business manager, a football coach – and encouraged the visiting group to see whether they might be able to find similar allies in their neighbourhood.

Keeping the visits relaxed and informal seemed to be key to their success. Visitors might chat to Harry and Dave about the car-wash business they ran from UEW, or talk to Jimmy about his plans to run an affordable white-goods repair service on the estate. One group visited on a Saturday, when Janis runs her Jazzy J street dance sessions at the gym, and before long she had got some of the young visitors onto the floor and mixing in with her class.

The aim was to send people away with a sense of optimism about what was possible and the confidence that UEW had been built by people very like themselves.

Pumping iron at UEW. Photo: Anthony Spencer.

Trying out the UEW approach in another setting

The original plan for the partnership with UEW had envisaged that, after the exchange visits, Greg would move on to coach groups on how to get started on a social enterprise project of their own. In the event, the groups from Nottingham and Sheffield decided that they had too much on their plate at the moment to contemplate getting involved in a fresh initiative, though they agreed that there was plenty of relevant experience in UEW to draw on in future when the time was right.

In Liverpool, after several exchange visits between UEW and CIB, the head of CIB, Bob Croxton, was enthusiastic about the idea of trying to get something going in the city along similar lines to UEW. Bob had identified someone he knew well from a particular estate in North Liverpool who was desperate to find new ways to deal with what he saw as the increasingly violent gun culture that had taken hold in his neighbourhood. He and Greg met a couple of times to talk over what might be involved, and together they visited three different churches in the city that might have been able to offer a base for a centre like UEW in North Liverpool. Weeks later, in August 2007, eleven-year-old Rhys Jones was shot dead in Croxteth – a stark reminder of what the communities of North Liverpool were up against.

A fourth group, CARISMA (Community Alliance for Renewal, Inner South Manchester Area), which was based in Moss Side in Manchester, just three miles away, had taken the initiative and approached UEW for help in shaping its ideas about a possible social enterprise venture.

CARISMA was set up in 2003 as a grass-roots community organisation to respond to growing concern about the impact of guns and drugs in the Moss Side community. Though most of the people involved in running it are Christians, it is not a Christian organisation, as the people involved say that they want it to serve all of the community and to be community-owned. CARISMA describes its main focus as networking, facilitating and advocating on behalf of the community, especially young people.

The group had been behind the establishment of the Street Pastors organisation in Moss Side, a group of trained volunteers who patrol the streets at night and offer befriending and signposting advice to people they encounter who are in need of help. Every year it also runs the Inner South Manchester Peace Week, to showcase the positive sides of the community and get young people and their families involved in activities focusing on peace on the streets. The Chairperson of CARISMA, Erinma Bell, is consulted regularly by Government and the media and, in 2007, was awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

An opportunity had arisen for CARISMA to acquire the building in which it then occupied an office. The building had been an old pub that had acquired a notorious reputation in the 1980s before being closed down and then bought by the local Anglican church, which let rooms in it to a number of small local groups. But the building was proving expensive to maintain and the church was now keen to sell it in order to focus resources on its other buildings. Visits to UEW had convinced members of the group that Greg might be able to help them think through what they might be able to do with the old pub.

The first meeting at the building was a chance for members of the group to show Greg around the building and outline some of the practical, physical challenges that would face them if they decided to take it over. They talked over how the actual conversion work might be done. Erinma had been on the Common Purpose leadership development programme and had already secured an offer of help with the conversion work from one of the business organisations she had met there. Greg was able to add that it would be really important for the group to involve local young people in the restoration work, as they had done at UEW, to give them a real stake in the place.

Greg listened to some of their initial ideas for the use of the building, which included continuing to rent rooms out for office and meeting space, holding an after-school club there, perhaps using space for a gym or training area, plus holding film nights, etc. That first session concluded with a round-up of action points for CARISMA, including getting in touch with key stakeholders, like the church, to let them know that CARISMA was now actively engaged in the process of making plans about what it would do should it succeed in acquiring the building.

It was agreed that the next step would be to get people together, so Greg could facilitate a session in which they would brainstorm what their vision of the place really was. That would give them a sense of what they were aiming for and would be the starting point for their efforts to raise the money that they would need to acquire the building.

A further meeting was arranged for one morning the next week. In the meantime, Erinma had a go at producing a first draft business plan as a starting point for discussion. This outlined the origins and aims of CARISMA, and listed lots of different things that it might be able to get involved with and the staffing structure that it would need, as well as referring to a whole range of potential partners. However, there was, as yet, no reference to how the various activities envisaged could be made to pay for themselves, along UEW lines.

We agreed that the main aim of the morning was to work out what were the most important activities that the group wanted to get going in the building and how they could be made self-financing.

Greg had three key questions he wanted to pose to CARISMA to help it get its ideas going about the future use of the building.

1. Who needs to be involved?

2. What speaks the language of the area?

3. How will you draw in the tough kids?

The session was really informal, with conversation bouncing backwards and forwards as Greg encouraged people to talk about their dreams for the place.

- It could be a kind of *base camp* – a 'launch pad' for people to spread their wings, go off on trips, broaden their horizons (starship *Enterprise*!).

- It had to be a welcoming place, somewhere for people to relax, learn new things, eat good food – maybe a healthy eating or smoothie bar, somewhere that people of all ages could come to – *a safe place in which people could really communicate with each other*.

- They hoped to be able to run a *crèche* from there too. (Two members of CARISMA are registered childminders and have good links with the council's childcare commissioning team.)

- There was general agreement that *including the kids likely to cause trouble was essential*. They had to be the ones that would defend the project – turning them from enemies into heroes?

- Getting people connected to their cultural origins was essential. Erinma thought that mixed-heritage kids especially felt disenfranchised. Somehow they had to develop a sense of common purpose together. She had run *personal development and cultural awareness classes* there before, which had been really well received. People had paid for the classes, and also for teas and meals, so the classes could be self-financing.

- They wanted the place to be a focal point for the young to gather – maybe with a *big screen, football games, PlayStations, etc.*

- During Peace Week each year, it was fantastic to see young people really strutting their stuff. So it would be good to have *space to encourage performers*, giving them somewhere to practise and try things out.

- The UEW idea of having somewhere you could kit out as a *hair and beauty salon* and then rent it out could also be very popular.

At the end of the brainstorming session, the ideas were grouped into a long list of possibilities:

- café bar/healthy eating, smoothie place;

- performance studio/dance/yoga/karate;

- childcare/crèche/after-school club;

- cinema/big screen;

- hair and beauty salon;

- classes in cultural awareness, self-development, etc.;

- events, workshops, trips to broaden horizons.

It was agreed that the next stage would be for the group to sift through these initial ideas and begin the process of gathering information about how or if each of them could be made to work and to pay for itself.

Developing ways of giving sensitive support

After each of the meetings was over, Greg and I would sit down to talk through how the session had gone and to pull out the main points about the ways he had tried to work with the group. Typical points to emerge might be the following.

- It had been good to have two or three key questions that had been thought about beforehand as a starting point for the morning.

- The creative, free-flowing discussion time that flowed from these questions had generated lots of ideas, with stories going back and forth in a very relaxed

and supportive way (partly the result of building trust between Greg and the group in previous meetings, and of not cutting things off too soon to focus on practicalities).

- It had also needed periodic points when one of us had intervened in the conversation to summarise what had been brought up and, if need be, to draw the discussion back to the key questions that Greg had used to start the morning off.

- After an hour or so, we had used a question about which side of the building might be best for the childcare as a spontaneous way to get people to stand up and walk around the space in the building, to start to visualise what could be happen in there and where. This had begun to shift the focus from ideas generation towards practical outcomes.

- We had managed to get a list of six to eight different activities that could form the core of what would happen in the venue.

- We had also succeeded in embedding the idea that these activities could be made to pay for themselves (the UEW model of a series of mini-businesses that each contributed to a central pot). This had involved helping to shift the focus away from the existing organisational culture of having to rely on grant funding with strings attached.

In the process of working with other neighbourhoods to see if the UEW approach might translate to different places, Greg was learning more about the extent and range of the many different initiatives already under way in the places he was visiting. Sounding people out about the possibility of getting the different groups together to share experiences, he found that all of the groups without exception liked the idea and said they wanted to be involved. CARISMA from Moss Side was especially keen and it was soon agreed that the two Manchester organisations – CARISMA and UEW – would work together to host the event: Street Peace 2007.

3 Street Peace 2007 – a different kind of conference

Members of CARISMA and UEW started work in earnest on plans for the Street Peace conference during the summer of 2007. Over the course of a few meetings, they agreed on the main lines of how they wanted it to be organised.

They began by thinking about who should come. They decided to invite a few people from each of the neighbourhoods that UEW had worked with recently. CARISMA agreed to invite organisations like itself that it knew of in Birmingham and Nottingham, as well as putting the word around to other like-minded groups from Moss Side. Greg was impressed with a report he had read about the Cowgate Community Forum in Newcastle upon Tyne and it was agreed to contact them too.

They would try to keep the numbers to about 40 people, because funds were limited and they wanted to be able to hold the event actually in the UEW building, so as to give it a much more informal feel than is the case with conventional conference settings. This meant that it would be impossible to invite groups from London. But, as so much of the media and political focus is based there, it was agreed that having an event that highlighted the non-London experience of groups in the cities of the Midlands and the North of England would be no bad thing in itself.

They agreed that the aim of the two days should be to give everyone involved a good chance to get to know the other people there, to generate a buzz between them about what they were achieving and to decide what they wanted to say to the policy-makers and authorities about how things needed to change. This meant devising a programme that would involve lots of chances for people to break into small groups to work on identifying the issues in their neighbourhoods and the ways in which they were setting about trying to transform behaviour and attitudes, especially among young people.

The two days would also include plenty of chances to chat informally, plus entertainment too – the Jazzy J dance crew was invited to give a short performance at the end of the first afternoon and the evening started with what was styled as a film première for a new 35-minute film about Wythenshawe, before moving on to a local restaurant for something to eat.

Raymond Bell of CARISMA speaks his mind. Photo: Marie Trubic.

Street Peace 2007 finally took place on 13–14 September. A total of 50 people attended some or all of the event, though, as some people were able to manage only one day, the average attendance was around 40. CARISMA and UEW decided that they wanted the event to begin with a religious blessing given by a local priest and the conference then got under way, with Erinma Bell from CARISMA and Sharon Davis from UEW jointly chairing the proceedings.

The following groups took part in Street Peace 2007.

- *Birmingham:*
  - Young Disciples.

- *Liverpool:*
  - CIB;
  - St Philomena's Residents' Association.

- *Manchester:*
  - CARISMA;
  - Hideaway Youth Project;
  - Street Pastors;
  - UEW.

- *Newcastle:*
  - Cowgate Community Forum.

- *Nottingham:*
  - Broxtowe Partnership;
  - Supporting Communities.

- *Trafford:*
  - TraffX Centre.

The day began with people getting together in groups to list the main concerns and issues that worried them on a daily basis.

- *Newcastle:* drugs and dealers; out-of-control young people; weapons and violence.

- *Liverpool:* false promises, red tape and bureaucracy; 'it could happen to one of our children'; 'no one can do anything'.

- *Nottingham:* parents not parenting; schools not delivering; criminal records holding young people back.

- *Birmingham:* gang culture, including intimidation, peer pressure and the wrong role models; lack of resources, funding and support; training not forthcoming from statutory agencies and the private sector; environmental, economic and social issues affecting the communities.

- *Manchester and Birmingham:* the Government's response (lack of) and bad policing (so people don't want to vote); lack of intervention from statutory agencies; lack of intervention by communities too ('it doesn't happen in my area'); the intimidation effect of gang culture (especially for older people); lack of facilities and opportunities for young people (jobs, self-employment) – boredom and the drug economy are the results.

- *Nottingham and Manchester:* fear of crime; fear of sons and daughters being shot; fear of territorialism.

- *Wythenshawe:* kids in gangs and power going to kids; kids who do wrong being sensationalised and kids who do right not being recognised; nowhere to go locally as a family.

When people were asked what they thought might help resolve some of these concerns, they came up with the following initial ideas.

- More police.
- End the 'grass' culture that condemns people for standing up for what is right.
- Break the circle of anti-social behaviour. Parents need parenting skills to do this – we need to improve their education, help them to set standards.
- Parental discipline with regard to guns and knives. Drive home the fact that guns and knives are not cool.
- Draw up a community code of conduct – a set of standards as to how we should live together, incorporating stronger values and respect.
- Schools need to attract the *best* teachers to areas with the *greatest* need.
- Look to educate the teacher to understand the issues of inner-city youth by forming tailor-made training/packages (for teachers) and having an easier system in terms of funding.
- Empower gang members and gang-affiliated members through effective education, social enterprise and having a role in the decision-making process.
- More government support for social enterprises that are run by local people (especially young people) and that can recycle money within communities.
- Apprenticeship schemes and more job opportunities.
- Black heritage as part of the national curriculum.
- Better housing and lighting, and a steering group or committee with local grass-roots representation to tackle issues like the environment.
- Media attitudes need to change – the good lads should be in the paper, not the bad lads.

Next, people worked in pairs or in groups on a series of topics that helped them to share ideas about aims they held in common and threats to the success of their work.

Tackling gang culture was central to the work of many of the groups. Typically, this involved the following approaches:

- building strong, positive relationships with young people and overcoming stereotypes held about them;
- listening to the experience of individuals and using the emotional power of empathy;
- using ex-offenders and people with direct personal experience of criminality to help young people learn from their mistakes;
- developing realistic exit strategies from gang culture;
- encouraging people to see education and employment opportunities as ways out for them;
- finding positive role models among local people;
- working to get young people to think about what lies behind barriers based on territories.

Street Peace 2007 – feedback time. Photo: Marie Trubic.

At least two of the groups were also committed to helping local people play a more active role in decision-making and planning for the future of their areas, and persuading the authorities to share more responsibility.

When people were asked about perceived threats to their work, many of them cited 'how the media treat us'. They also expressed the feeling that, however valuable their work might be, it often seemed to lack real credibility with the authorities and the powers that be: 'Community groups do all the work, but statutory groups get all the credibility and the money!'.

Lack of funding – long term funding – was also an issue, with some people contrasting the millions they felt had often been wasted in expensive physical regeneration (although the group from Cowgate Community Forum felt strongly that they had controlled how their SRB money was spent).

However, some groups also worried about being caught up in a financial dependency culture, 'spending all our time chasing money'.

Several people were critical of what they perceived as tokenism from their local authority, with 'groups just being used to tick boxes'. One group complained of a real lack of support from statutory services and a history of 'broken promises'.

Perhaps more fundamentally, some people worried that 'people in authority fail to recognise the problems on the streets – and the Government is in denial'. Someone from Liverpool spoke about how the authorities could fall into the trap of inadvertently giving the gangsters credibility. They gave the example of how they had seemed to sanction pressure on local shopkeepers to shut their businesses to mark the funeral of a so-called gang leader – just what the gang members needed to boost their self-esteem and frighten the rest of the community.

Sometimes the problems lay within the community itself: 'parents who don't believe their kids can do any wrong'; historical differences between people who refused to let go of old issues – 'people carry on fighting old battles'.

On a practical note, two groups felt that one of the biggest problems they faced was with the issue of school exclusions, which saw children just turned out onto the streets by their schools.

Most people also felt that keeping themselves going in the face of the problems and difficulties could be a struggle:

> … bureaucracy can be so long-winded and it's hard to keep the right people motivated.
>
> … we can end up being reactive rather than proactive.
>
> … we end up not listening to other people's experiences and opinions and trusting them.

Sometimes they felt as if they just didn't have the time, or the skills, or the resources they really needed. So burn-out could be a real risk to the success or continuity of the work.

Day one concluded with an exercise in which people were asked: 'What is needed to bring about peace at street level?'.

A majority of the groups highlighted the need for a whole-community response based on achieving a fundamental culture change in the direction of positive values.

- Individual and collective responsibility, positive action and discipline from the top down, which helps build self-worth and respect in the whole community.

- We need to empower the community with hope, direction, guidance and a greater understanding (Newcastle and Liverpool).

- We need credible alternatives to gang culture, i.e. local enterprise for local people, using local support networks and local role models (Manchester and Nottingham).

- We like to think that this conference is starting something totally new, which every street group and community group can belong to, so that the union can represent us at national and local level to get us the money and training we need to get on with our work (Manchester and Birmingham).

For other groups, the key to Street Peace lay in changes to the education system.

- Prevention is better than cure. We need to give our insights to teachers about alternative ways of bringing out the best in our children (Newcastle).

- We need better education systems that don't leave excluded children out on the streets (Newcastle).

- We need parents to be responsible for children who are excluded. Maybe another system could work better for them – *a quality alternative* (Newcastle).

- We need new approaches to learning that children can relate to. Why can't school allocations for children being excluded be taken away and given to community groups who can deal effectively with them? (Liverpool).

The morning of the second day was taken up with groups sharing more about what kind of work they actually did. Highlights from groups not already described in this report included the following.

- Young Disciples from Birmingham now works with young people, pulling them away from gang culture. It runs many programmes in schools, e.g. anti-guns, anti-knives, anti-bullying, and organises residential programmes all over the country. At the same time it does lots of lobbying, speaking to government and shadow ministers, heads of justice organisations, criminologists, etc., as part of its campaign to raise awareness and try to influence policy. Its overall theme is to create positive exit strategies that enable people to get out of the gang lifestyles.

Street Peace 2007 – sharing experiences. Photo: Marie Trubic.

- In Liverpool, CIB was trying to develop a two-week intensive project that would take ten young people who were borderline criminals. They would spend a day in a Category B prison meeting people serving sentences there, as well as spending time with survivors of crime. The aim would be to transform their thinking (change their mindsets), and then connect them to people and groups who could help them sort out their futures.

- In Manchester, the community-based youth project called the Hideaway has recently set up a young men's project in response to tensions between local young men and young Somali men. It organised a trip to Spain for people from both communities, which worked really well. It also runs a young women's project, in response to the fear felt by some young women (sometimes they hear disturbing stories of sexual assaults as part of gang initiation, etc.). The fear of territories, and histories, leads people into trouble, so it limits where people can go and what they can do. Young people using the Hideaway are asked to sign an undertaking to leave their gang affiliations outside. For many of them, getting jobs is still an issue.

- In Newcastle, the Cowgate Community Forum has managed to get itself a base in a local school and secure some funding, so that one or two local residents can be employed. It now works on various issues, such as the Wise People's Project. This project gives support for local people experiencing mental health problems – it was set up after four young lads had committed suicide on the estate because they had not felt able to ask for help with their problems.

- The Supporting Communities organisation in Nottingham works with 13–19 year olds, especially in three mainly black communities in the city. It offers support for families and young people, mediating with the schools and helping young people to move on into college, jobs, etc. It focuses on strengthening a sense of identity – for example, by working on the history of the abolition of slavery – and on broadening horizons through trips to other places, etc. It also supports people going through the criminal justice system – and would like to work with them six months before they come out of the system. It has also done a great deal of work on conflict resolution, which has included visits to Northern Ireland, and on holocaust awareness, including the genocide in Rwanda. The organisation's main immediate focus was on the Peace and Unity March, which it was busy planning for one Saturday in October 2007.

- In Trafford, Kevin has used his experience as a professional boxer and dancer to set up the TraffX Centre. The idea was to use street dance, Thai boxing, etc. to get young people involved and competing in different areas, and to show them

that they could get positive media exposure and celebrity through their own hard work. The project has been self-funded over the last five years.

By the end of the second day, people had succeeded in agreeing what they felt should be the underlying values implicit in their 'Street Manifesto'.

- We want to persuade everyone in our communities to take responsibility for what is happening on our streets.

- We want to bring together young and old.

- We want to break down the wall of silence that has surrounded these issues.

- We want to promote respect, pride and positive values, so that people no longer have to live in fear.

There was a strong sense that Street Peace 2007 had enabled people to find out what kinds of activities they were all involved in, and to draw strength and confidence from each other. Now the participants had agreed some common values they felt that, next time they got together, it would be good to create a programme that would enable them to pass on their different skills and knowledge to each other.

The overriding message was one of unity and common cause between the groups, even though they came from many different backgrounds and areas. When people were asked for their personal responses at the end of the two days they had just experienced, they were keen to say how much they had got out of the event:

> Really encouraging – glad to be part of a united front – we are all aiming for a common goal … great friendship – we've all become united as one – all aiming for the same goal – peace on our streets.

> Just so much positivity – going away with greater motivation!

Learning from other's experience had been a key part of the two days for many people:

> Hearing about how people have changed their lives after being involved in crime has been a real eye-opener.

> Glad to see how different communities are all in the same boat – it's been a blessing to meet people from other areas.

For some people, the way in which everyone had managed to be supportive of each other – the 'process' of the two days – had been as significant as any of the actual outcomes of the event:

> People have listened and communicated really well – a good example to the kids and positive role models.

> I've been so impressed with the intelligence in the room – people know what it's about – together we can find real and meaningful solutions.

Above all, people were keen to stress how much they had in common:

> People here all love their community and want to make it a good place for the next generation.

> Embracing differences and recognising our commonality has led to friendship. There is a common thread between us now.

> Whether a white kid or a black kid gets shot, it's one of our kids that gets killed.

Greg Davis, Sharon Davis and Erinma Bell round-up day 1. Photo: Marie Trubic.

Beyond Street Peace 2007

It can be argued that, in an unconscious echo of the aspiration for mutual support and solidarity that characterised the culture of the working-class communities of earlier generations, the Street Peace groups were asserting a need to join together to make the authorities recognise what they are doing to try to counter the culture of criminality – and to back them in their efforts.

It remains to be seen whether the groups involved in Street Peace will be able to sustain their support for each other once they are caught up again in the demands of their own neighbourhoods and estates. But, already, there are encouraging signs that some of the groups who attended want to keep up their contact with each other and try to find a way to develop a more united voice to express their views to policy-makers in the coming months and years.

- UEW took a coachload of over 50 people down to Nottingham to take part in the Peace and Unity March organised by the Supporting Communities organisation – complete with specially printed T-shirts emblazoned with the slogan, 'Wythenshawe supports Nottingham'.

- Representatives from the groups have begun to meet to start work on the next Street Peace event for 2008 and to think about how to get the key messages in their 'Street Peace Manifesto' across to the media and policy-makers.

- Contact has been established with the Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit, which is embarking on a two-year programme designed to look at the contribution that civil society organisations across the Commonwealth can make towards counteracting the suffering caused by gun violence and gun culture.

4 Learning the lessons

How the project worked out in practice

The purpose of the year-long engagement with UEW was to understand more about how this unusual social enterprise works and to look at the extent to which its approach might be relevant to other working-class communities facing similar levels of challenge from an increasingly pervasive culture of criminality.

The original proposal for the work identified three specific aims:

- developing promotional materials that explain UEW's approach;
- inviting neighbourhoods, funders and regeneration managers to attend 'Seeing is Believing' visits in Wythenshawe;
- assisting UEW in establishing a mentoring role with a number of other neighbourhoods.

The proposal went on to envisage that the project might lead to the following results.

- The very interesting work by UEW would be presented to wider audiences (other neighbourhoods, funders, regenerators, policy-makers).
- The linking of UEW – in a mentoring role – with up to three other neighbourhoods in the first instance, with a view to transferring the approach to other areas.
- A wider understanding in policy and practice circles of the benefits of the UEW approach and the advantages it has in 'reaching the parts that conventional regeneration can't reach'.
- An appreciation of how important it is to allow space within neighbourhood regeneration for innovative work to grow without being hampered by bureaucracy.

At the heart of the project was the relationship of trust and mutual support that developed between myself and the UEW team. Greg had been clear from the outset that he wanted me to work with UEW because he felt that I could connect with the group's experience and was on the same wavelength. He was conscious that 'UEW is not your traditional community group – it's a bit gritty and spiky, and not everyone gets it'.

So a key part of the process was ensuring that we were as flexible as possible about how we worked together, with discussions about next steps – and reflections on how meetings and visits had gone – being fitted in around the demands of the day-to-day work of running UEW. These were reinforced by written notes of key points, which were taken in the first instance by me and later by Greg himself. The outcome was a fluid, two-way process in which insights and reflections could be shared, challenged and reviewed on a basis of mutual respect.

The first stage of the work had been to use our own networks to identify a small number of other northern neighbourhoods with a similar profile to Wythenshawe and persuade them that they might benefit from looking at the experience and work of UEW.

The process of developing partnerships with groups in Nottingham, Sheffield, Liverpool and Moss Side in Manchester has been documented in some detail because it was partly an exercise in how to do things differently in a way that was informal and was based on building trust through telling stories of what life was like on the estates in question.

The visits did provide opportunities for several of the groups to draw inspiration and confidence from what UEW had achieved. One of the groups made a point of involving local young people in the visits as a way of broadening their horizons and developing their social skills in an unfamiliar environment.

Greg already had considerable experience in giving talks about the situation in Wythenshawe and the work of UEW. The experience of working with me as the facilitator provided by JRF gave him an insight into the processes involved in scoping out the specific needs of other groups. He thought about the questions he could ask that would help them to develop their thinking. He listened to their stories and then collaborated with them in trying to come up with creative new approaches to the challenges that were facing them.

Inevitably, there were also limitations to what could be achieved. UEW still had a gym to run and lots of other activities to keep going. As the year progressed, Greg had to deal with the challenge that besets many organisational leaders – how to balance the various external demands on his time and energy with the continuing need to provide management and leadership at UEW itself.

Similar processes could be seen in some of the neighbourhood organisations with which UEW wanted to work. They already had many demands on their time, both as organisations and as very busy individuals. So just finding and keeping dates for visits to and from Wythenshawe proved to be harder than anticipated.

Given the limited time available for the initial process of choosing the neighbourhoods that UEW would work with, the right number of potential partners had been identified relatively quickly. However, what the process did not do was establish whether all of the groups were really ready to embrace the 'maverick social enterprise' model that is UEW.

UEW's special feature that differentiates it from some of the other groups with which it worked is their strongly entrepreneurial approach, which is manifested in:

- getting people used to the idea that they have to pay to use the gym, dance classes or whatever, and that this can create a series of income streams that contribute to keeping the whole place going;

- being a place that prides itself on encouraging local people with ideas and dreams to find a way to try them out.

Other groups admired this model and the financial independence it offered, but seemed unsure about whether they could find the people and the energy to make it happen in their own neighbourhoods. They were therefore inclined to see it as too difficult, whereas the UEW approach was usually just to have a go, not to be afraid and, if it didn't work, too bad. Confident leadership was therefore key to the whole process.

However, the UEW formula of trying to identify 'the real street leaders' – often people running 'working-class businesses' – as a source of entrepreneurial confidence might not be that easy to replicate everywhere, unless groups are offered some ongoing help and facilitation to make it happen.

On the other hand, when a social enterprise opportunity presented itself, as in the case of CARISMA in Moss Side, the group liked what it had heard about UEW's way of doing things and asked it for help. As a result, the discussion sessions that UEW was able to hold with the people from CARISMA helped them to visualise what they wanted to do with the building they hoped to buy and to crystallise the concept of how they might be able to make it actually pay for itself.

So, as with the JRF Neighbourhood Programme, taking more time to check out the initial strength of motivation of potential partners might have improved the chances of them deriving long-term benefit from their involvement in the project.

As the year progressed, it also became clear that the publicity given to a series of gun crime incidents meant that UEW was increasingly coming to the attention of both media and politicians. So the UEW profile was beginning to raise itself, without the help of the 'Seeing is Believing' visits envisaged at the outset of the project.

Immediately after the Street Peace conference, Greg's growing circle of contacts began to work with him on plans for a major fund-raising 'fight night' in London in December 2007, to kick-start the process of building a boxing-gym extension for UEW. This was preceded by a five-page feature article about UEW in the *Daily Telegraph* colour magazine on 8 December 2007.

Back in Manchester, UEW's reputation for attracting young people who are fed up with conventional school has led to an informal link with a local high school. This sees a group of up to ten 15 year olds coming to the gym on a weekly basis for a two-hour session, which involves an intensive workout followed by a session with a mentor from the school. If it works, it could be the start of other schools or criminal justice agencies finding ways to make good use of the relationships that UEW has succeeded in building with local youngsters, which other methods are failing to reach.

In the light of UEW's increasing media profile, one of the main changes to the operation of the project was the decision to reduce the number of 'Seeing is Believing' visits from two to one final session at the end of the project – and to channel the remaining funding into supporting Greg's idea for a 'conference' of like-minded neighbourhood groups. The process of visiting and working more closely with other neighbourhoods had convinced him that there were areas like Wythenshawe where ordinary working-class people were trying to find their own solutions to what was undermining their quality of life, and where they often felt marginalised by the powers that be.

Crucially, the groups that attended Street Peace 2007 gave the project access to a range of experience and opinions that may not have been heard before in quite that way, either individually or collectively. The groups are all engaged in an impressive range of work in their communities. Some, like Young Disciples from Birmingham, have developed a sophisticated, strategic approach to getting their message across and, as a result, have been recognised and consulted by key government policy-makers. For others – particularly groups from traditionally white, working-class estates – winning that recognition still feels like an uphill battle.

The key messages

At the end of the year-long partnership with UEW that culminated in the Street Peace 2007 event, a number of key messages have emerged.

- The creativity and energy shown by UEW and groups like the ones that attended Street Peace can make a real difference to the lives of people living in neighbourhoods that have been blighted by criminality.

- Whether people are from white working-class estates or predominantly black inner-city neighbourhoods, they face very similar problems in relation to gun crime and the impact of the drugs economy, and, as the experience of UEW and CARISMA suggests, they have much to learn from each other.

- These groups are engaged in trying to transform the prevailing culture of their neighbourhoods. They are putting pride back into the community and creating festivals, marches and other means for people to recognise each other's achievements in a way that is reasserting a sense of collective support, which used to be the hallmark of working-class culture.

- The confident, entrepreneurial approach of UEW encourages other people in the neighbourhood to feel that they can have a go too – whether it is starting a car wash business or running urban dance classes. Where this level of leadership and motivation is spotted in a neighbourhood, it is worth nurturing and supporting – even though it means taking risks.

- Groups like UEW and CARISMA have the power to draw in people who just do not feel at home with organisations like statutory youth services or council-run leisure centres, or who have problems that these agencies might find too hard to handle.

- UEW and the other Street Peace groups are trying to achieve lasting behaviour change among young people at risk from criminality. A strong faith base (and the belief that everyone is capable of change) might be part of what drives and motivates many of the people involved in this challenging transformational work.

- Many of the groups make use of the power of positive example that is offered by people who have been involved in criminality themselves and now want to help others to avoid going down the wrong road – a process that is not without risks, but can make a real and lasting impact.

The policy implications

This report has suggested that the very neighbourhoods most affected by the culture of criminality are often the ones where local people are coming up with their own creative ways of trying to transform the tough situations in which they find themselves.

If this is true, then there are a number of ways in which policy-makers and practitioners could support this process and nurture it in areas where it might not yet be much in evidence.

In terms of strengthening the capacity of neighbourhood organisations like UEW, the Street Peace 2007 initiative showed what could be achieved when just a handful of groups were enabled to meet together for two days to share experiences and hopes for the future.

Offering support to future networking events of this kind – including widening the range and number of groups able to join in – could be a relatively simple way to enable neighbourhood groups to learn from each other, and to improve the effectiveness and impact of their work.

Resourcing the kinds of exchange visits and mentoring activity that UEW was able to undertake thanks to this JRF project could also pay dividends, provided that care was taken to identify groups that are ready to take advantage of the process and move up a gear in their level of operations.

Just as important is the need to develop the capacity and skills of managers in statutory agencies involved in regeneration, education, youth work and the criminal justice system to deal flexibly and creatively with groups like UEW. Such groups might have demonstrated their capacity to work effectively with some of the most hard-to-reach individuals in their neighbourhood. Yet, often, they are kept at arm's length because of a reluctance to deal with what may be an unfamiliar organisational culture, or to take any risks.

Many of the groups involved in Street Peace expressed strong feelings of being ignored or marginalised by the very professionals supposed to be tackling the real issues in their neighbourhoods. So it is important to look at ways in which people involved in the informal neighbourhood sector and the statutory sector might develop a better understanding of each other's work, as a basis for building mutual trust and respect. Facilitation or brokering by people trusted across sectors could help, as might encouraging development organisations like Common Purpose to make

a point of trying to recruit leaders from groups like UEW onto their development programmes.

In addition, faith organisations could learn from the key role played by faith in the lives of many of the main protagonists involved in UEW and Street Peace, and of other socially engaged faith groups. They could encourage their members to go out and get more involved in work that puts their faith into practice in some of our tougher neighbourhoods.

Several of the Street Peace groups have found it an uphill struggle to get taken seriously by their local councils. So, for example, channelling all new investment in extra facilities and activities for young people exclusively through local authorities will risk continuing this marginalisation – unless the statutory agencies are actively encouraged to develop partnership working with local groups like UEW.

There is scope for a number of statutory organisations to follow the example of some local schools and find ways of using groups like UEW on a regular basis, including helping them to work more effectively with young people most at risk (as suggested in the new Children's Plan). However, this needs to be done in a creative way that neither exploits local groups by expecting them to work for peanuts, nor ties them up in red tape and outputs to such an extent that it takes away their independence and cripples their capacity to deliver the goods.

So, in summary, the challenge for policy-makers is to create space for the energy and enterprise of people like Greg Davis and UEW – to stop seeing working-class neighbourhoods only in terms of the problems they experience – and to support the efforts going on all over the country to develop a positive, creative culture of mutual support.