

Nick Buckley

Nick Buckley, Chief Executive of Mancunian Way, looks at anti-social behaviour in Manchester and explains how his charity is tackling the problem.

I'VE SPENT the last decade helping to reduce crime and anti-social behavior in some of Manchester's toughest neighbourhoods for the Crime and Disorder Team at Manchester City Council. Last year I took voluntary redundancy because all the work I did was stopping due to the spending cuts. I could have been redeployed, but I didn't want to do a job that I didn't feel passionate about, so I set up Mancunian Way to continue the work I'd been doing at the city council.

I'm not some middle-class do-gooder with no idea of what life is like for a young person growing up in a deprived area. I didn't have a privileged background – I was brought up on a council estate in a single parent household. To show you what my school was like, one of the teachers was stabbed 42 times when she tried to take a porn magazine off a pupil. So I know what it's like growing up in a tough neighbourhood and this means I can talk to young people at their level.

I've seen first-hand how a simple intervention can stop a young person going down the wrong path and that is what we are doing at Mancunian Way. We work in schools, on the streets, in homes, in youth clubs - anywhere we are needed. By using education, engagement and promotion of personal responsibility, we are working to stop the rioters of tomorrow. We're not a pink and fluffy agency, we challenge all poor behaviour. We also dispel some of the myths that are out there. For example, young people often tell me there are no jobs, but then I point out that people are coming here from other countries to work, so that's simply not true. We help them develop the skills, such as communication and CV writing, which they need to find work. We also build up their confidence, because although they might come across as big and tough, they're not.

In Gorton, we're running a beauty and make-up course for girls. The course is actually about a lot more than beauty and make-up, as we look at issues such as relationships, drugs, bullying and self-esteem. We show them that the women they're looking at in magazines don't really look like that and if they're trying to be like them, they won't succeed.

Another project we run shows how crime

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doesn't pay, which takes you through the whole of the criminal justice system in a day. We go through being charged, put in a cell and going to court. We have ex-offenders talking about their time in prison and explaining what it's really like. We look at the victims of crimes, because often they don't realise that every crime has a victim.

We also provide advice and services to businesses that are having problems with crime and anti-social behaviour. Often businesses don't realise that they're contributing to the problem. For example, we worked with a betting shop that was regularly having its £500 pay out machine smashed up by frustrated customers. We suggested they put a limit on the amount of time someone could play on the machine and it never got broken again. Mostly it was about staff training, such as how you speak to people before they get irate. More generally, businesses can do things to cut down on anti-social behaviour. For example, don't wait for gangs of young people to regularly gather outside your business, then call the police; nip it in the bud early on by challenging the first couple you see hanging around. In the same way, clean up the first bit of graffiti you see rather than letting it become a major problem. Businesses also need to be realistic about anti-social behaviour. The police won't turn up straight away with lights flashing the first time you call. Keep a record of what's going on and when it happens, so you can show the police. Also don't exaggerate, for example don't say young people are 'always' causing trouble if it's only happened once.

I feel it is everyone's responsibility to do what they can to improve our great city and communities - that includes the business community. We are trying to develop links with businesses and are seeking support from the ones that share our vision and want to be part of the solution.

Another myth is that parents don't care about what their children do. Out of the 1,200 parents I've dealt with over the years, only one person said he didn't care. Even those parents who are having problems with drink and drugs themselves, want better for their children. When I worked for the city council, I would bring the parents into the



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police station to tell them what their kids were doing. In one case we had reports that a 12-year-old boy was hanging round with two 19-year-old burglars, so the worry was that they were using him to get into properties. I spoke to him and his mother and he admitted what had been going on and it stopped. What we do isn't rocket science, but it takes people to do it. But don't just take my word for it, go to www.mancunianway.org.uk and see the work we're doing. ■