

My son was shot dead. Now I help

THE last time Tracey Ford saw her son Andre was five years ago when he poked his head round the door, said, "see you later Trace", and left home to attend a friend's party at Streatham Ice Rink. A few hours later, Ms Ford, a financial adviser, got a hysterical call from Andre's girlfriend. "All I could hear was the word 'shot,'" she said. Her only son, a Croydon-born boy, had been shot twice by a group of youths and would never see his 18th birthday. That same year Eliza Rebeiro, a 14-year-old also from Croydon, visited her close friend on life support after he had been stabbed in the neck. He survived, but by 17 Ms Rebeiro had witnessed three stabbings and lost two friends, including Wesley Sterling, an innocent 16-year-old who was knifed at a friend's birth-

THE DISPOSSESSED FUND

Two women responded to personal tragedy by launching voluntary groups that have made a huge difference to young people caught up in gangs. **David Cohen** meets the hidden heroes awarded grants by the Standard's Dispossessed Fund

day. Ms Ford and Ms Rebeiro both responded to tragedy by starting voluntary grassroots groups in Croydon. Extraordinarily passionate and brave, they are among London's hidden heroes, helping young people caught up in gangs and founding small organisations that have already made a big difference. Ms Ford, 49, launched the JAGS Foundation – an acronym forged from her son's name James Andre Godfrey Smartt-Ford – to support families of murdered children and to empower teenage girls involved in gang culture. "My son

I saw parents whose children had also been killed. It was horrible'

Tracey Ford

was killed in front of hundreds of people, yet his killers have never been caught because the witnesses were too afraid to speak up," she said. "Even Andre's girlfriend was silenced. That was a big disappointment to me. Our programme helps young women develop the confidence and self-esteem to have their voices heard and to avoid gangs altogether."

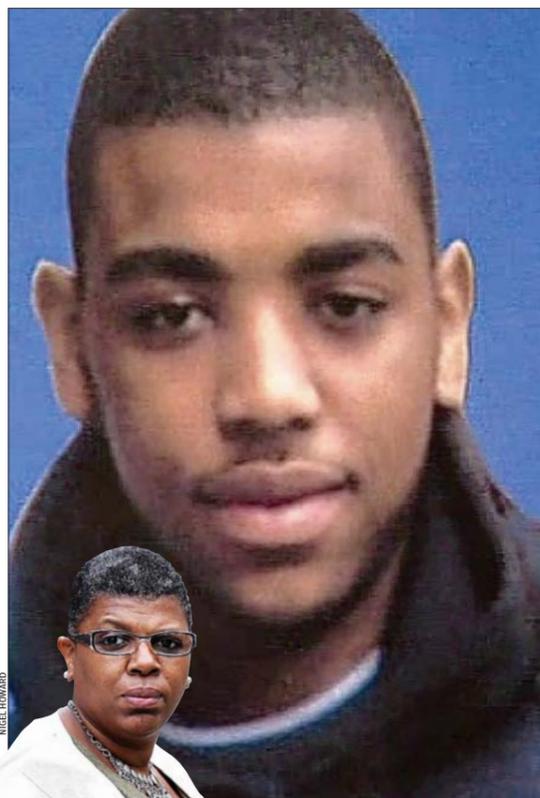
Ms Rebeiro, 18, started Lives Not Knives on her 14th birthday, after she had a T-shirt printed at Camden Market with the slogan and it made a big impact on her friends. Today Lives Not Knives has taken over her life and she deploys 76 volunteers to deliver workshops in 37 schools, with demand for their services growing exponentially.

The Evening Standard Dispossessed Fund has made grants of just under £20,000 each to support the JAGS Foundation and Lives Not Knives. They are two of 66 grants – amounting to £1 million – that we are giving to support community groups tackling poverty across the capital.

This extraordinary lifeline – the second time in six months that our award-winning fund has handed out £1 million – comes from a million-pound windfall given by Sport Relief. It brings to £4 million the amount given to charitable projects by the fund since its launch in July 2010.

Ms Ford, a single mother who was the first in her family to go to university, said that losing her son had turned her life upside down. "I had started my own mortgage-broking business, but I found myself at community meetings seeing distraught parents whose children had also been killed. It was horrible.

"When I was growing up, I only ever remember one child murdered by other children and that was Jamie Bulger. But in the month Andre died, three other children were killed by other children. That year 28 youngsters were killed in London and 27 the next. I had done well financially, buying my first house at 25, and I decided to give up my business to create a place for families living with child murder to support each other. That's how JAGS came about." The group has evolved and Ms Ford and half a dozen



NIKEE HOWARD

volunteers go into schools where they do peer mentoring with teenage girls caught up in gang culture. They also take referrals from agencies helping vulnerable young women. "At the last school, we spoke to 850 students over two days.

MANY girls are at great risk because of boy-friends, brothers, or cousins, and some have been gang-raped or sexually exploited but are too frightened to seek help. We tell our stories and it creates a space for the girls to open up. It's about helping girls understand what is unacceptable and that they don't have to be silenced."

Josie Hedhli, 21, a single mother of three-year-old twins, told how JAGS turned her life around after being in a gang and becoming pregnant

GROUP PROFILES

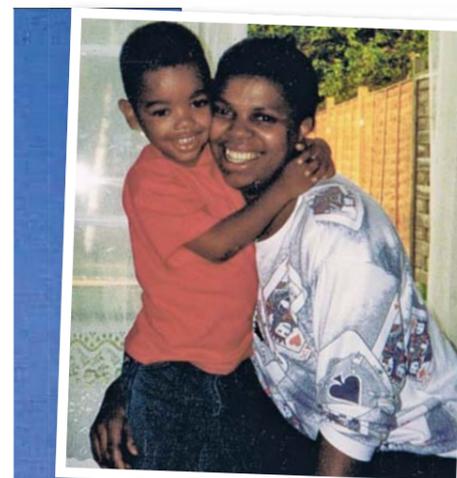
JAGS
Founded by Tracey Ford in memory of her teenage son, JAGS helps girls caught up in gang culture.
Amount awarded: £18,820
Where: Croydon
How cash will be used: To fund their programme called CARE – Choosing Another Route.

Empowerment. It will train 50 at-risk young women to become advocates for themselves and peer mentors for others.

LIVES NOT KNIVES
Eliza Rebeiro started the group in 2007 at the age of 14 in response to stabbings among friends. Today it

deploys 76 volunteers and delivers workshops and peer-mentoring in 37 schools.
Amount awarded: £19,918
Where: Croydon
How cash will be used: To provide mentoring and workshops in schools that expose young people to the reality of gang membership.

families of murdered children



Sparking change: murder victim Andre Smartt-Ford, and his mother Tracey. Above, mother and son together. Eliza Rebeiro, right, is the founder of Lives Not Knives



ALEX LEMAITRE

at 17: "I had reached breaking point when a women's refuge referred me to JAGS. Tracey was the first adult I could talk to. Now I have become a JAGS volunteer." Ms Rebeiro started Lives Not Knives after she was kicked out of

school at 13 for disruptive behaviour and ended up in a pupil referral unit. A talented cello player and actress who'd won a coveted place at the National Youth Theatre, her rebelliousness was a shock to mother Monique, 45, a milliner. She said: "Eliza had been a top student at a high-achieving middle-class school, but suddenly she was bringing home hoodlums and our happy-go-lucky life was shattered." Ms Rebeiro recalled life with the "wrong crowd": "We would do little robberies and drugs and after a while I thought it was normal for people to stab each other. Then it got to a point where people weren't just stabbing, but killing each other, and that's when I had the T-shirt made. It had a big impact because the community responded and it became a campaign and then a formal group with trained mentors. We go into 25 primary and 12 secondary schools and tell our stories."

Lives Not Knives works alongside the police and fire brigade providing citizenship days for schools, as well as one-to-one mentoring. It has addressed 7,000 children over two years. Ms Rebeiro has won a Diana Award, a Philip Lawrence Award, and a Community Champion Award. Until this year, they operated on a voluntary basis, but they recently got funding from the Home Office and now a Dispossessed grant. "The schools call us because they don't know how to help their gang-affiliated pupils," said Ms Rebeiro. "There is a huge demand for our services. We're working with children as young as nine and 12-year-olds who sell drugs. I want to catch them before they use a gun or a knife, and the Dispossessed grant will enable us to reach more pupils before it's too late."

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More stories:
standard.co.uk/dispossessed

ALSO RECEIVING FUNDING

STRAIGHT TALKING (£19,961 grant)
Straight Talking peer education seeks to reduce teenage pregnancies in Hounslow and help teenage parents back into education, employment or training. This grant will be used to train and employ 15 teenage parents to go into schools and deliver peer-to-peer workshops to 600 pupils on the reality of having children at a young age.

YELLOW SUBMARINE HOLIDAYS (£11,625)
This group provides short-term breaks for adults with learning disabilities in the Ladbroke Grove area of Kensington and Chelsea. They will use this grant to offer residential respite breaks for up to 40 people, including those with autism and Down's syndrome, helping them become more independent and allowing their carers to recharge their batteries. Priority will be given to families in financial hardship.

THE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PROJECT (£18,540)
This project, begun in 2003, provides marginalised women in Sutton with business skills and supports them to set up consortiums. This grant will fund a 10-week course taught by tutors from Sutton College to help 30 women with an interest in cookery and childcare to become self-employed or set up a business.

SHAK (£17,216)
South Hampstead and Kilburn Community Partnership is situated on the Rowley Way estate in the deprived Kilburn ward of Camden, and trains disadvantaged people to help them into work. The grant will be used to employ two music tutors to run accredited courses in sound

engineering and music technology for 60 people aged 16 to 19 who are not in employment, education or training. It will also help with CVs, apprenticeship placement and job search.

OPTIONS 4 CHANGE (£19,964)
Operating in Lambeth, it has a seven-year track record working with hard-to-reach young people caught up in gangs and criminality. This grant will deliver the Turnaround Project, a 16-week intervention for 15 young offenders referred by Coldharbour Ward's Safer Neighbourhood team. It will work with their parents, too, and follows a pilot programme with five people who are still out of trouble.

STREET TALK (£19,137)
It provides a therapy and advocacy service for women caught up in street-based sex work. This grant covers the costs of a counsellor, therapist and supervisor to provide support to 50 women to help them break the cycle of addiction and exploitation. The project takes referrals from hostels and day-centres for sex workers and vulnerable women.

HARROW LAW CENTRE (£18,450)
Formed in 2010, the centre provides a free, independent legal service to disadvantaged people facing poverty, debt or homelessness in Harrow. The grant will be used to fund a part-time solicitor who will be able to provide free legal advice and representation for up to 800 people for one year.

■ The full list of the 66 recipients from this grant round can be found on our website at dispossessedfund.com.

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