

Inside Time report

“There are no shortcuts in life,” says Ken Hinds, chair of the London borough of Haringey’s Stop and Search monitoring group and a leading mentor with A Band of Brothers, the Haringey branch of the community support charity. “That’s what I tell the young men who join us,” he adds. “I’ve been there. I know what I’m talking about and they listen.”

Hinds was born in Trinidad and came to the UK with his parents when he was five years old. Brought up and schooled in Tottenham, he says he, “went off the rails,” at 15 after his father died. “My father was a strong disciplinarian. When he died I had no respect for any man in authority. I became a rebel. I started off with petty stuff and then progressed to armed robberies and a wages snatch. I got caught aged 18 and was sent to prison for five years. In prison I became what they called, ‘a control problem.’ They kept me in isolation for long periods. Whenever I was let into the main population there were riots. I wasn’t a leader, but I spoke up whenever there were protests to explain why the protests were being held. Of course then the officers would shout, ‘Ah, ring-leader!’ In the end, the good thing about it was that I got the respect of people in the jails, even the serious characters. It cost me a lot of my remission and parole, but the fact is I didn’t care. I came out after nearly serving the whole five years with a massive attitude problem and new criminal skills that I learned in prison. Twelve months later I was back inside. I thought I was cool, I wanted to be good at what I did, but I kept getting caught. Criminal activity acts like a cancer, it just grows.”

“I also recommended A Band of Brothers to my younger brother and, 2 years on, he’s just completed his training with them as well. It’s great to know there’s a project out there for men of all different ages and that me and my brother can stay involved for as long as we want” Tony

Hinds, now in his fifties, got involved in the music and film business for a number of years and enjoyed the high-life traveling the world, driving high powered cars and mixing with major players in the business, including well-known rock stars. But criminal activity in that business also brought its own pitfalls and he was lucky to get out relatively unscathed. Back in Tottenham and ten years working for a housing association brought him into contact with the wider local community and it was in that context around 2007 that he became involved in Operation Trident, the police operation set up to investigate gun crime among young black

Banding together



Co-ordinator mentor with the charity A Band of Brothers Ken Hinds tells Inside Time how older men in his community are helping disenfranchised youths to build a more fulfilling life

men in London. “My purpose then was to try and stop the violence and preserve the lives of the young people involved in gang violence,” he says. “It was just so tragic seeing young men getting sentenced to minimum terms of 30 or 40 years - I mean minimum - sometime they hadn’t even killed anyone, they’d just been in the gang when somebody was shot. If I’m honest I see myself as being part of the problem back in the day. But now I’m one of those people who managed to turn my life around and I want to help others, a lot younger than me to turn their lives around before it’s too late. I’m still a work in progress. Most of us are. But my involvement with A Band of Brothers helps me as much as it helps the young men we mentor.”

Founded in Brighton seven years ago A Band of Brothers now also has branches in Crawley and Eastbourne. The Haringey group is the latest cohort and has been going for almost four years. It was just over two years ago that Hinds was at an event talking about his work in stop and search when he met someone who invited him to come along to see what the Band of Brothers did. “He didn’t explain to me that it was camping in the woods, in a tent,” he says smiling. “I was used to only doing five star. If I’d known it was roughing it in the woods I

would not have gone. But I went. I’ve been doing it for more than two years now, and I still don’t like camping. But I still go, because of the magic that happens. The first thing that happens is that you recognise that we all have emotional triggers. We all have issues that are buried deep within us that drives us, drives our behaviour, stopping us from becoming the man we want to be. What the band of brothers does is guide you through the process. All the mentors have been through it. It’s about balancing your life and being the best you can. What I love about the band of brothers is that it is exactly that - a band of brothers. The young men we mentor have been in jail, they’re on probation they’ve got serious issues. We help them to become the men they want to be.”

“I have also staffed four weekend trainings with A Band of Brothers and it’s been really satisfying putting older men through their paces so that they can become great mentors for more young men like me” Lucas

That there is a need for organisation like A Band of Brothers is beyond dispute. Men account for eight out of 10 people cautioned by the police, and nearly nine out of 10 people found guilty of indictable offences. Men are responsible for 97% of burglary and 92% of violence against the person. Two thirds of all male offenders are in their 20s: the majority of the prisoner population of England and Wales are men under the age of 30. Despair is also a big factor for young men - the second most common cause of death among men under 35 is suicide. The results achieved by the Band of Brothers is impressive. Reoffending is down by 80 per cent, employment up by 80 per cent - and one hundred per cent of those who get involved say it is worthwhile.

I am now nine months into my three year apprenticeship and on track to becoming a fully fledged technician. I start work at 8.30am and finish at 5.30pm. It’s my dream job and I feel so lucky to be doing something that I’m genuinely passionate about. Bilal

Initiation to the Band of Brother takes place on weekend outings, in forests, on mountains, as Hinds says, “camping.” This is known as the Quest. During the Quest the young men must pledge to keep their word, not to take criticism personally, to make no assumptions and always to do their honourable best. Physical and emotional challenges are set and new life narratives formed in open and honest group discussions. Once initiated, the mentors are there whenever needed and run weekly support sessions known as the Circle. In Haringey the Circle takes place every Tuesday evening.

“Today we have more than fifty in our Band of Brothers,” says Hinds. “Some have criminal pasts, some haven’t. But all are welcome”

For more information see www.abandofbrothers.org.uk

“Locked in here all day; you don’t turn criminals into citizens by treating them this way” with kind permission from Billy Bragg

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