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## Jason Turner

Young People's Programme Manager, Community Links  
Former detached youth worker

"Listening to what is coming from the ground more, is my dream. We can and must trust the community; otherwise you are doing an injustice.

As a young person I found my self-identity in sport and became a sessional worker, on Community Links' Street Sports programme. We'd listen to young people on the street, their challenges, their hurt. The football and hockey were just the tool – it was building the relationship that mattered. Countless times we'd see young people who used to terrorise youth clubs then become volunteers or sessional workers, secure full time employment elsewhere and later become responsible parents.

To some young people we are Mum, Dad, aunt, or uncle – to others a mentor. They take on board what is important down to the relationships we build. We establish trust, they open up and then you are giving them support, which takes them in a positive direction. Not always is it perfect. Occasionally you see young people struggle again and again. Others give up on them, but we carry on. In the end they see the light and make that change.

There are opportunities out there for young people. But the need is to help them to believe these are for them and to access them. They need someone to stand by them, trust in their ability and give them a chance, repeatedly. This is where positive peer role models – an approach dating back to the start of Community Links – can have such an impact. The young people then start to see themselves in the role model.

But this is hard work, over a period of time, and often not understood – or supported. It is work on the streets and in centres, both of which have had to close because the funding is no longer available from the local authority or elsewhere.

I see now young people having to adapt a lot quicker and younger. Postcode violence is really bad now, the lengths young people need to go to survive, to keep credibility – carrying a weapon to not lose face – they've become desensitised. I am starting to lose sleep now over what young people are doing. Where will they now get the support they need?

I have some hope. From once frontline and now managing I see where policy makers, funding bodies and society can play a much bigger part. I hope in the future they can listen much more to what is coming from the ground and enable us to positively influence where resources go. Then we can achieve the progress we'd all like to see. The results will come, and we will see them endure and reach the next generation."

*Shortly after Jason gave this story his fears were, tragically, realised. Separate knifings occurred a short distance from two of Community Links centres and, then, one of his young peer mentors was fatally shot a short distance from home.*

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