

NEW 10 YEAR REPORT CELEBRATES SCOTLAND'S PREVENTION APPROACH TO KNIFE CRIME

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A report charting the success of the No Knives Better Lives initiative in Scotland has been launched today.

No Knives Better Lives (NKBL) is a national programme designed to deter young people from using and carrying a knife. It is a youth work focused initiative supported by Scottish Government delivered by YouthLink Scotland in collaboration with local partners.

In 2009, the creation of No Knives, Better Lives was a response to the very high incidence of knife crime in Scotland and the corresponding high numbers of young people charged with handling an offensive weapon. This position has changed dramatically over the last decade. The majority of young people in Scotland do not carry a knife.

The focus is on prevention, helping and supporting young people to change or challenge behaviours.

Scotland has adopted a public health approach to tackling violence as advocated by the World Health Organisation – treating violence as an infection that can be cured. This includes prevention activity and early intervention, coupled with appropriate law enforcement as necessary. No Knives Better Lives is part of that approach adopted in 2009.

There are two main strands to NKBL's prevention work with young people:

1. Working with partners in individual local authority areas in Scotland to support a strategic capacity building approach to prevention and to reach and train 100s of practitioners every year, who in turn deliver prevention work with tens of thousands of young people every year.
2. Communicating prevention messages to young people through social media and innovative engagement programmes like the 'Balisong', designed for schools, by young performers, which empowers young people to stand up, speak out and get help if a friend or classmate is carrying a knife.

Commenting on the report, Humza Yousaf MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Justice said:

"YouthLink Scotland and local partners have delivered substantial, sometimes life-changing prevention activity over the last decade, and more recently delivered the NKBLs 'Balisong' play in every local authority, reaching 20,000 young people across Scotland. We have seen a significant, 85% reduction in the number of young people under 18 convicted of handling an offensive weapon, from 456 in 2008-09 to 68 in 2017-18 – alongside the wider fall in violent crime. While there is much more to do to ensure every young person, no matter where they are from, lives free from the harm caused by knife crime, I am very grateful

to YouthLink Scotland, their partners and the many young people-involved in helping make Scotland a safer, better country to grow up in.”

Tim Frew, CEO of YouthLink Scotland said:

“We have seen a significant reduction in the recorded incidence of violent crime and possession of offensive weapons in Scotland, particularly amongst young people. While this is good news, it is important not to see our work as complete regarding the issues of knife carrying, conflict and violence. The cyclical nature of the problem, coupled with the small increase in knife crime prevalence in 2018 means that it is important we do not rest on our laurels.

“A worrying resurgence of knife crime in other parts of the UK, particularly London, indicates that we need to keep working hard to keep our young people safe from the harmful practice of knife carrying. Prevention work must continue. Crucial partnerships between the youth work sector, schools, Police Scotland and other agencies that contribute to local NKBL initiatives need to be sustained and supported to deliver a safer Scotland for our young people.”

You can read the full report [here](#) and track the NKBL Tenth Anniversary through @NKBLScotland #10YearsOfNKBL

Ends

For media enquiries and further information please contact Sarah Paterson, Communications and Public Affairs Manager at YouthLink Scotland on 07804 603762 or 0131 313 2488 and at spaterson@youthlinkscotland.org OR Vicki Ridley, NKBL Scotland on 0131 313 2488 vr Ridley@youthlinkscotland.org

Notes to editors

Young People and Knife Crime in Scotland

At its inception in 2009, No Knives, Better Lives was a response to the very high incidence of knife crime in Scotland and the corresponding high numbers of young people charged with handling an offensive weapon. This position has changed dramatically over the last decade.

Between 2008-09 and 2017-18, the number of violent crimes recorded by the police in Scotland has nearly halved (falling by 49%), while recorded crimes of handling an offensive weapon (where not used to commit another offence) have fallen by 60%. The number of young people, under the age of 18, convicted of handling an offensive weapon has fallen by 85% (from 456 in 2008-09 to 68 in 2017-18). The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey also shows a 46% fall between 2008-09 and 2017-18 in violent incidents experienced by adults in Scotland, and that 12% of adults thought that people carrying knives was common in their area in 2017-18, down from 22% in 2009-10.

The general trend has been a large reduction in violent crime and weapons possession over the last decade. No Knives Better Lives attracted a lot of positive publicity for playing its part in helping to make Scotland a safer place for young people

Over the ten-year period from 2008-09 to 2017-18, the number of crimes of handling an offensive weapon recorded by the police in Glasgow City decreased by 71%.

Who are we?

No Knives, Better Lives (NKBL) is a national programme designed to deter young people from using and carrying a knife. It is a youth-work focused initiative supported by Scottish Government delivered by Youth Link in collaboration with local partners.

The aim of the initiative is to reduce the incidence of knife carrying amongst young people by raising awareness of the potentially devastating risks and consequences associated with carrying a knife and promoting positive life choices. NKBL is a primary prevention, national initiative that is delivered at a local level.

NKBL launched in Inverclyde in 2009 before rolling out to eleven other local authority areas. In 2014 this support was made available to all Local Authorities in Scotland.

NKBL - How does it work?

There are two main strands to our prevention work with young people:

1. Working with partners in individual local authority areas in Scotland to support a strategic capacity building approach to prevention and to reach and train 100s of practitioners every year, who in turn deliver prevention work with tens of thousands of young people every year.
2. Communicating prevention messages to young people through social media and innovative engagement programmes like the 'Balisong' school bystander play tour

Why it is successful/what can be learned from the NKBL approach?

1. We have a huge reach across Scotland, currently working in all 32 local authority areas. This is possible because we operate as part of a "community" of national and local organisations applying a 'public health' approach to violence reduction who understand and buy into the need for sustained primary prevention work and, critically, prevention work which values young people and aims to support their wellbeing.
2. The training and support we provide is informed by the best available information about what factors contribute to knife carrying and what is known to work in relation to prevention "messages", addressing risk factors and building resilience amongst young people.
3. The four R's is No Knives Better Lives' shorthand for what is important for young people to know in order to keep themselves safe. These are the key messages we want young people to hear:

REASSURANCE – HARDLY ANYONE CARRIES A KNIFE

RESPONSIBILITY – IT'S OKAY TO REPORT KNIFE CARRYING

RISKS – YOU ARE MORE AT RISK OF HARM IF YOU CARRY A KNIFE

RESILIENCE – HAVE THE CONFIDENCE TO RESIST KNIFE CARRYING IN THE FIRST PLACE

4. We, and our partners, work in partnership with young people. We train young people as NKBL peer educators and as violence prevention mentors (VRU Education Scotland's MVP programme). They in turn talk to other young people about the risks and consequences of carrying a knife; what you can do if you know that someone else is carrying a knife and how to challenge the perception that behaviours like knife carrying are the "norm". We see young people as assets and partners in prevention and we support them to address issues that affect their lives and their communities.

5. We ensure that the work we do does not contribute in any way to the issue of knife carrying. We avoid talking about and portraying knife crime in unnecessarily sensationalist and alarmist terms and avoid scare tactics. We know that the two main reasons that young people give for knife carrying are: fear/protection and because they think it's the "norm". If what we do and say makes young people afraid or contributes to the "normalisation" of knife carrying, evidence suggests that we run the risk of, at best, exacerbating the issue and, at worst, of becoming part of the process by which behaviours like knife carrying become an epidemic.

Is there still a need for prevention work?

Given the overall dramatic decrease in the incidence of knife crime and handling of offensive weapons since 2009, is there still a need for knife crime prevention work with young people?

Yes – because statistics show there are still young people who are carrying and using knives.

Yes – because prevention work shouldn't be initiated in response to a "crisis" but, by its very nature should be something we do to prevent that crisis from occurring in the first place and, importantly, to prevent it from reoccurring in the future.

Yes - because empowering educational work with young people is critical to prevention. If we do more of the prevention work early on, then it might not be necessary to have expensive youth justice or custodial interventions.

Yes – because one incident is one too many and has a devastating impact not just on the lives of those directly involved but on the families, friends and communities.

Yes – because it is impossible to control access to knives, therefore we have a massive duty of care to educate young people to be responsible around knives.