

HEADLINERS

Be blunt - say no to knife life

Headliners and PSNI warn that copy-cat crime will result in doing time

Four years in prison for carrying a knife....would you risk it?

Too many young people in the Northwest are!

Headliners Foyle reporters **Michael Grimes, Fearghal McFeely and Cathal McDermot** talked to young people in the Northwest about this growing problem.

According to recent local media coverage knife crime in the Northwest has soared by more than 300 per cent in the past five years. **(Derry Journal, July 2007)**

The same article revealed that in Derry knife crime rose to 70 incidents this year compared to 54 in 2003. The most dramatic increase was in Limavady, a town just 18 miles from the city where 45 cases were reported in 2007/08 compared to 14 in 2003. And figures from 2007 indicate that 1,062 knife-related crimes in Northern Ireland as a whole were reported to police compared with 968 incidents the previous year.

Despite a rise in statistics the young people we spoke to on the streets in Derry don't carry a knife, don't know anyone who carries a knife and don't know anyone who has been attacked with a knife or offensive weapon. They did not know that the penalty for carrying a knife or an offensive weapon in a public place doubled this year from two to four years and that the legal age for buying a knife rose from 16 to 18 last year.

And local police are doing all they can to keep it this way. Through awareness and education initiatives they are determined that Northwest's young people will continue to say no to knife-life.

Foyle Inspector Trevor McKeown said: "Fortunately we don't have a serious knife crime problem in Foyle, however, we cannot get complacent." "Educating young people about the dangers associated with carrying a knife is key to prevent these crimes taking place. "Our message is clear and simple, never carry a knife. Knives take lives. We need a collective approach to tackling the scourge of knife crime. We would urge everyone in the community to assist our efforts and help take knives off our streets for good."

Even though many are not directly effected by knife crime and don't even know the penalties involved, there are still, as the statistics show, too many incidents of knife-crime in the Northwest. This is where the PSNI's educational programme comes in. When one person uses a knife to attack another the damage and devastation it can cause to so many others cannot be measured.

The PSNI stress that even one young person wielding a knife in Derry is one too many. Inspector McKeown continued: "Just before the summer we re-launched our knife awareness advertising campaign, targeting the 11-18 age group to warn them of the dangers and consequences of carrying a knife. "We already have a proactive educational campaign underway with over 15, 000 post primary school children throughout Northern Ireland having already been educated on the dangers of carrying a knife. We continue to work in partnership with other agencies such as local councils, the education centre and community and voluntary groups to tackle this problem."

Despite the steady increase in knife crime in the Northwest we are still a far cry from the situation in the rest of the UK, but for how much longer? It seems that every time you turn on the television or open a newspaper that someone has been attacked by a knife in many major cities in the UK.

Local councillors and police fear that the steady rise in knife-crime in the Northwest could have something to do with 'copy-cat' crime. Young people see how common it is to carry a knife and use it in other cities. They see how much of a status symbol it has become and they copy. The Inspector stressed: "Many of our young people think it is acceptable to carry a knife. For many of them, a knife is a status symbol, something that makes them more acceptable to their peers. For others, it is seen as a form of protection, but nothing can protect them from the consequences of carrying or using a knife. The fact is that knives are dangerous – people get hurt and lives and communities can be ruined."

As we go to press with this article parents and young people were on the streets of London in protest against knife crime. One of the organizers spoke on the radio saying: "We want to show people that we have had enough. It is almost like carrying a knife has become something every young person does."



Here's what some young people in the Northwest had to say:

"I have a knife but I wouldn't carry it. I thought that the sentence for carrying a knife was 9 years. I have been attacked by a bottle in Derry but never a knife. My advice to stop knife crime is, just don't sell knives!" **(Paul, Reach Across Youth Initiative)**

"I would never dream of carrying a weapon. I thought the sentence was six years. People should wise up and stop carrying knives!" **(Ann, Reach Across Youth Initiative)**

"I think the sentence for carrying a knife is between three to five years. The knife crime rate in Derry could become as bad as that in England because some of the incidents like riots happen almost on a monthly basis in this Derry. I worry about friends who live in dodgy areas of the city getting attacked when they are out at night. I'm not usually out and about in dangerous areas but once I was followed by a man who pulled a knife on me. I pushed past him and got away safely. If a knife wielder's own knife doesn't get used on them someone else's will. Schools have very much influence but if they were to arrange a trip for students to Altnagelvin Hospital to see some victims of knife related incidents, they would take it more seriously." **(Diarmund, Reach Across Youth Initiative)**

"I didn't think there was a prison sentence at all for knife crime. It's probably a knock on the knuckles or community service. Schools can play a part but the whole community can also play a part. I think we give the schools too much responsibility when really it's a parental responsibility. Churches and community groups need to take responsibility too. If it goes at this rate I can see metal detectors going into schools, community centres, and pubs." **(Ann, Oxfam manager who works with young volunteers in her shop)**

"It's very scary to go to the town or go out for a drink. This is not something you could just wave a magic wand at and solve it. Alcohol could definitely be a factor in this ever-growing epidemic." **(14 -year old who did not wish to be named)**



"The thought of a child carrying a knife is atrocious and terrifying." **(Concerned local parent).**

Headliners will keep exploring this issue as preventative measures and the impact of these are rolled out across the Northwest. The actual sentence, as mentioned above for carrying a knife is now four years. None of the young people spoken to got it correct. We can only hope that methods being introduced by PSNI and efforts made by organisations such as Headliners to raise awareness will be enough to cut-back on knife crime in the Northwest.

If you have any information on knife-crime or any other crime please call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

3 comments

rights

i think its right that people are trying to stop nife caring

jessica (age 11) from colburn, 01 December 2008 11:50

good

i think its good to help people not to carry one around

i think its verry good expaining the consaqence to them.

courtney (age 14) from sadfresb, 01 December 2008 11:45

knife crime

quite amazing to understand that knife crime is on the rise i believe that knife crrime will always be on the rise unless some miracle happens

the real issue here is to understand the reason why people who carry knives actually carry them. personally i am quite shocked to hear that youngsters carry

knives i wouldn't dream of seeing my neices or nephews carry knives.

sam (age 17) from birmingham, 29 October 2008 10:24

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