

**Croydon Family Learning (CALAT)**  
**WFL FLIF Course 'Gangs, Weapons and Identity' Spring 09**

Our WFL FLIF programme, 'Gangs, Weapons and Identity', targeted BME families with teenage children and delivered a series of sessions on key issues, including why people join gangs, the consequences of using weapons, alternative choices and anger management. The course was delivered for us by a local youth training organisation, Elevating Success, based in one of the most deprived parts of the borough, in partnership with Crimestoppers, Croydon Met Police, Youth Offending Team, Croydon PCT and 'Love Life'.

Parents joined the course for various reasons, some because of real concerns over teenage children who were very much at risk of becoming involved in gangs, some whose children had been threatened with knives, and some who just wanted information and advice on how to protect their children best and prepare them for life in London. Although some of the young people attending had no direct experience of gangs or knives themselves, others had friends involved with gangs ("Loads of my friends are in gangs"), and others had friends who had experienced violence ("My friend got stabbed"). Their anxieties focused around getting stabbed or shot and someone they care about being hurt.

There were very positive outcomes for the families involved, as well as for the organisation delivering the course, whose director (the trainer on the course) is now part of a police committee in Croydon. Families found the sessions both informative and challenging. They were made aware of the issues that exist in relation to gangs and were able to discuss in confidence, and in a relaxed environment, personal incidents related to gangs, weapons and identity. Feedback from families was very positive: "Thank you very much for the course. I learned a whole lot and my eyes are opened up to the reality of what is taking place with our young people of today and I realise that it is far too close for comfort...I am even more pleased for the insight it has given to my boys"..

One 15-year-old boy on the course was very much at risk of getting involved in a gang, was not engaged with school and causing his parents genuine concern. Following the course, however, particularly hearing the testimonies of young people who had been convicted of violent crime as a result of involvement in gangs, he has steered a different path and is now doing well at school and at home. Another family, whose 15-year-old son would not attend, came with a younger child and gained information and insight which enabled them to advise and support their son sensitively at home, for example on what to do if he was stopped and searched as a young black male, and he is now attending college and has not been arrested, which is a significant achievement.

Overall the course, despite its challenges, was a success, and Elevating Success is now considering setting up a parents' forum as a result, to provide parents with the opportunity to gain information about risks their teenage children face, and guidance about how to support them best.