



'Some good has to come out of Daniel's death'

The killer of 16-year-old Daniel Gee-Jamieson will be sentenced this week. Daniel's mother Mandy tells **Ciara Leeming** that his death must not be in vain as she campaigns against knife crime

A mother whose teenage son lost his life in a stabbing will speak out against the senselessness of knife crime as his killer is sentenced.

Daniel Gee-Jamieson was just 16 when he bled to death following a pre-arranged fight near his home in Gateacre, Liverpool, last July. He was unarmed but was stabbed in the leg in front of dozens of onlookers.

Owen Cousins, 17, was last month found guilty of manslaughter and will be sentenced on 15 March.

Daniel's mother, Mandy Jamieson, plans to use that hearing to talk about the devastating repercussions of carrying knives.

In her victim impact statement she will say: "To carry a knife as an accessory to match your North Face does not make you brave, nor does it make you hard...

It just shows how weak and insecure you really are and proves hands down that real men do not carry knives.

"I want you to remember this while sitting in your jail cell. There will never be any winners in this situation... If you're weak and not able to fight, it doesn't mean you can take a knife and just stab someone and take their life from them. Look at where you are now."

Daniel was the third fatal stabbing in Liverpool over a nine-month period.

Knife crime in Merseyside is currently at its highest level in a decade. According to the Office of National Statistics, police recorded 945 serious crimes involving knives in the 12 months to April 2018 – up 18 per cent on the previous year.

Knife crime is also on the rise nationally. Police recorded more than 39,000 offences involving blades in the

year to June 2018 – the highest number on record and an annual increase of 12 per cent.

Recent stabbings in London and, in Hale Barns, Altrincham – where a teenager has been charged with the murder of 17-year-old Yousef Makki – have brought the knife crime to the top of the political agenda.

Meanwhile, over the last academic year, there have been 30 separate reports of children with knives at school in Merseyside – including two eight year olds caught with blades. Teenagers aged 13 and 14 were the most prolific offenders. And in nearby Leyland last week, six people were arrested by police after they were tipped off that a group of young men were heading to Runshaw College with weapons.

In Liverpool, frustration with the inability of the authorities to get a grip of the situation has led teachers, youth workers, concerned members of the public and bereaved parents to take matters into their own hands.

Both Daniel and Brandon Regan, 17, who was found dead in a Speke garden in January 2018, had attended Employability

Solutions in Garston, an alternative education provider for young people who have been excluded from mainstream school. Regan died three months after the fatal stabbing of Sam Cook as he celebrated his 21st birthday in a city centre bar.

The futile violence led Claire Cook (no relation), chief executive of the college, and her colleagues to start talking to other organisations about what could be done about the increase in knife carrying.

"Knives have become an accessory for some kids," she says. "They aren't necessarily intending to use them but

Through her Platform 4 Change connections she found counsellors willing to volunteer time.

Recently, the Red Cross has helped to adapt a first aid session that teaches participants what to do if someone is stabbed, including how to stem bleeding with whatever garments they have to hand. Young people can be referred onto this by parents or youth workers.

Those involved are also working to raise public awareness about the issue via the Real Men Don't Carry Knives campaign. This has attracted support from Alder Hey Hospital, Aintree

"To carry a knife as an accessory to match your North Face does not make you brave."

choose to carry one because others are doing the same – and that then puts them at a 60 per cent higher risk of becoming a victim themselves, according to police.

"The young people who we work with in our centre are vulnerable to becoming involved in knife crime. Sadly, I think the attitude can sometimes be that it's not a big thing if it's children like these who are victims. But the killing of Sam Cook sent shockwaves through our organisation and the city – all young people were clearly now vulnerable to this.

"We started asking ourselves if it was enough to simply talk about knives with our students – which we already did regularly."

Cook's team worked with Anfield Boxing Club to develop Platform 4 Change, which has received the backing of five families who have lost children to knife crime, including Mandy.

Their work to date includes delivering hard-hitting assemblies for school pupils about the damage knives do to people's lives, teaching young people what to do if a friend is stabbed and offering counselling for youths affected by knife crime.

The project is largely funded by local people and relies on people volunteering their time and skills. A youth advisory board has been created to shape the school assembly, delivered to thousands of teenagers by boxing club youth worker Alan Walsh.

When Regan and Daniel died, the huge wait for counselling for their devastated fellow pupils led Cook to think creatively.

University Hospital, Liverpool City Council, the LFC Foundation and Everton in the Community.

This year's aim is to develop youth provision to try to divert teenagers away from trouble, including sports coaching sessions in the evenings, as well as training knife crime ambassadors who will lobby decision-makers to take concrete action.

Cook says: "We decided early on that we were no longer looking to the authorities for answers. We want to empower young people to come up with ideas for how we could prevent others from going through this.

"The really important work goes on behind the scenes, in our schools, in our hospitals, in our parks and in our youth clubs. We are working hand in hand with parents who have lost children to knife crime. We want to transform young lives and we want to give young people confidence to report their friend if they are carrying a knife."

Back in Gateacre, Mandy would like to see activities and support available for young people in her neighbourhood, to keep them off the streets.

She says: "I still want to help, despite everything. I think young people can change if they are given the opportunity to do so and if they are offered the support to free themselves from this pack mentality that has developed. I feel very sad about what's happened. There are no winners here. But some good has to come out of Daniel's death, otherwise it's a waste of 16 years." ■



Stab victim Daniel, 16, and his bereaved mum Mandy (left). Main photo: Rebecca Lupton

Cold comfort

Mandy Jamieson remains haunted by what happened to her son.

She was present as he bled to death and has suffered taunts and intimidation from young people in the aftermath.

In her victim impact statement, she will tell the court how local youths waved at the funeral cars and tried to ruin the wake. None had shown any remorse for what had happened, she will say.

The first time it rained after Daniel's funeral, she put umbrellas over his grave because he did not like him getting wet or cold. Six weeks after his death, the family marked his 17th birthday – and that of his twin sister Annie – next to his grave.

Her statement says: "All my family were with me but I was numb. It devastated me having to stand by a grave to celebrate his birthday. I wish I could just one last time see his face again – smell him, touch him, hug him, kiss him. People look at me and say I am so brave and dignified but that could not be further from the truth because inside I'm screaming."