

## **Street Weapons Commission – Liverpool**

**Andrew Edwards**

**Andrew Edwards**

Hello.

**Cherie Booth**

Hello, Andrew. Andrew Edwards, you're the Assistant Editor of the Liverpool Echo.

**Andrew Edwards**

Yeah, hi.

**Cherie Booth**

And thank you for coming today. I just wondered how do you feel about gun crime in Liverpool. What do you think ... how many the percentage of crimes are that involve guns in Liverpool?

**Andrew Edwards**

The total figure is something that I don't have to hand. What I do know is that very recently there have been figures that would suggest that the number of offences with gun crime involved are down. But I think that the environment in Liverpool at the moment is pretty much based on what happened in August last year with the murder of Rhys Jones. And clearly there's a mindset now in the city that we wanna get this sort out.

**Cherie Booth**

I think with the actual figure being 0.5 percent of crimes actually involve guns, it's interesting, isn't it, that the perception is that guns are a big problem when the statistic would suggest that it's a small problem?

**Andrew Edwards**

Mmm. That's a very interesting point. I mean when it comes to gun crime, quite clearly when you get an incident and you get an incident like Rhys and you get an incident like

others then it's the consequences are so massive. So your percentage might be low, but the consequences of gun crime are enormous. So whatever the percentage of weapons that you're talking about, we need to get them off the streets.

**Cherie Booth**

Well they do a lot of harm in the wrong hands that's for sure.

**Andrew Edwards**

Absolutely. That's a really good point, because the weapons that are coming in are getting into the hands of entirely the wrong sorts of people. I mean you can't really argue that amongst the criminal fraternity they get into the right hands.

**Cherie Booth**

No.

**Andrew Edwards**

But when you think about some of the teenagers that are involved in the gun crime and gang culture – I apologise – in Liverpool, it's a matter of serious concern. You're talking about 15 or 16-year-olds actually managing to get their hands on firearms. Many of them, from our knowledge, don't actually understand even what the weapons are capable of and are quite happy to go

out, point them at somebody and shoot. The crazy thing is that the statistics also tell you that most of the time they miss, 'cause they're not exactly experts in handling weapons. So they're out there and every now and again they'll fire a gun and it will seriously injure or kill somebody. And so from our point of view and the sort of campaigns that we're running it's important that we can

[amend] a system that allows weapons to get into the hands of people of that sort of age.

**Cherie Booth**

Well what about the role of the media in all this. I mean isn't there an argument that in fact sometimes the media focus on all this can actually glamorise guns and gang culture and actually make the problem worse not better?

**Andrew Edwards**

Yeah, we...

**Commissioner**

They're good for circulation. A good crime story is gonna sell more papers than Councillor Bloggs who's fiddling his bus pass.

**Andrew Edwards**

Some people in certain areas of the media might feel that way. We at the Liverpool Echo don't. The Liverpool Echo is a community newspaper that depends on the community for its sale, and so therefore we stand up for communities. Yeah, major stories sell newspapers, and that's part of our business. But we're always in Liverpool. Don't forget there are gonna be

certain titles that don't mind if they come in and have a raid on Liverpool and then move out again. We're always here and so we have to support our readership. And we do that by campaigning, I think, in the right and positive way. So, for instance we've got a campaign on the go at the moment called Liverpool Unites, which was launched after the death of Rhys Jones. And

that campaign is an anti-gun campaign. It's aimed at getting people who ... Well, the most important side of it is that it's allowing the people of Merseyside as a whole to stand up and deliver a message that they're against the gun culture and they're against gun crime. It's also got a number of stated aims. But also it's raising money, £500,000, towards the building of a

community centre in Rhys's name in Croxteth where he was born and brought up. We've got a great relationship with Rhys's mother and father over this.

**Cherie Booth**

Right.

**Andrew Edwards**

And so we are very positive about it. We feel that if we get an incident of that sort of nature, that as a paper which cares about its readers and cares about community we actually need

to campaign and get things done. So...

**Cherie Booth**

Well let me pause there then.

**Andrew Edwards**

Mmm.

**Cherie Booth**

You're actually raising money for a community centre.

**Andrew Edwards**

Yeah.

**Cherie Booth**

Is that because you think involving young people more in the community and giving them something to do is actually going to channel their energies into a more positive area than...?

**Andrew Edwards**

Yes it is. You're 100 percent right. That's exactly what it is. The...We're involved in a number of programmes at the moment. Liverpool Unites is our charity and what we're doing there is supporting the Rhys Foundation, which is actually raising £2 million altogether for the community centre. And the idea is that you give kids in the area something to do, something positive to

centre on. We're also involved in working with the Merseyside Community Foundation, who you're gonna be speaking to a little bit later on. And they've got a programme – I'd like to say we've got a programme – called Young Transformers, which is actually getting grants into communities where people are doing good things. People might be running football clubs, youth clubs

and all the rest of it. They need a few hundred quid, a couple of thousand quid. They come to the Community Foundation to get the support for those activities. And so people – and there are loads of them who are doing very good things in Croxteth and Norris Green and similar areas – can actually get the money to keep them going. And so that is providing an

alternative, 'cause  
you see we...

### **Cherie Booth**

And how much, I mean how much focus though do you actually give? You know bad news sells newspapers, good news everyone says no one's interested in. How much focus can you give as a newspaper to these good news story and the positive efforts?

### **Andrew Edwards**

It's a very deliberate philosophy change that we're involved in. We actually don't necessarily believe that just bad news sells newspapers. Relentless bad news puts people off. You can take a different approach to bad news and try and take positives out of it. I can give you an example. You get ... A lot of antisocial behaviour is a problem around Merseyside and the gang

behaviour. And as a result of that we can get a stream of negative stories going into the paper. We became aware of that and people were becoming almost numbed by it. So we launched another campaign called Reclaim The Neighbourhoods. Now Reclaim The Neighbourhoods, working with Merseyside Police, is a campaign through which people who are getting

problems can contact us, and the police, and we can build a picture of where particular hotspot areas are and actually go and tackle them. And so rather than just have another story about somebody's house having bricks thrown through the windows, another story about yobs gathering outside the off-licence and giving the people who live in the area a bad time, we can turn

it on its head and say, "We can do something about this," and, "come to us, we'll publicise it, we'll work with the police on dealing with it." And that's been very successful as well. So, you know, bad news sells because bad news is hard news. Disasters sell. But we actually think that good news and a positive approach can also work very, very well.

### **Commissioner**

But do you think it will make a difference to the kind of hard end of offending around knives and guns and so on? I mean are these the kids who are gonna beat a path to the community centre, to the activities, to the interventions that are now being developed?

### **Andrew Edwards**

You asked a great question there and I would like to think I've got a great answer. The amount of work that I've been doing in this for the last couple of years with the Echo, we've seen that there are certain sections of society who are gonna need to be dealt with in a certain way, and these are the people that are already committing the crimes. You could almost say that you know

they're beyond a cure. Obviously dealing with the justice system needs to deal with them, and we're talking about tougher sentences and we're talking about getting them out of circulation so they can't pose that threat anymore. The people that we're working with, the Echo and the Young Transformers, are people who have still got a chance. So you've still got kids that are out

there that are involved in playing for their local clubs, they might still go to Cubs, Scouts, Guides; organisations like that. We need to get to them and persuade them that they can have far more fun and be far more positive by being involved in these activities, joining a local cricket club, than ... succumbing to peer pressure from people who are probably on the wrong

side of the law. So there are ... The people we really need to work on are the people who have still got a chance, and the people who are beyond help are dealt with by the justice system.

### **Cherie Booth**

Fay.

### **Fay Selvyn**

Your campaign sounds fantastic and I hope, you know, you manage to raise the money. But I do have to just ask the question about how you choose which campaign you're going to work on. My understanding is there's about eight times as many reported rapes as there are gun and knife crime incidents. So, why...you're very clear this isn't about you being...glamorising

an issue, it isn't about you trying to sell newspapers, why is gun and knife crime so much more of a story and a campaign for you than say something like rape?

**Andrew Edwards**

I think that if people who are organising some...Sorry, I'll repeat that. I think that if people who are at the forefront of anti-rape campaigns came to us and said that, "These are the statistics, these are the problems that we're facing," we'd support it! I can't think of a time when the Echo has turned people away when they've asked to work with us on important subjects. So I'd say that's a really important subject and I'd say to people who do want to raise that issue come and see us. It's as simple as that. I mean the murder of Rhys Jones was a focal point for so many of us and it was an appropriate time to launch the campaign that we did. Equally, if you get a terrifying horrific sexual assault in Liverpool, then we would consider that to be a focal point as well for us to work from. And we have done that as well by the way. There have been some very brave victims who have waived anonymity. To do that they need to literally sign a form to say that they are prepared to go public with what's happened to them and to have their photograph taken and all the rest of it and we've gone that far. So we will work...we don't exclusively campaign on guns and crime just because we think it's a great big issue. We do on many. In fact, completely the opposite to that, one of our other campaigns is called Stop The Rot, which is a campaign to restore crumbling buildings in the city which have been neglected by landlords who are just hanging on to them for money.

**Cherie Booth**

You talk about Liverpool and Liverpool still has a very strong sense of community.

**Andrew Edwards**

Mmm.

**Cherie Booth**

I mean how important do you think that is and what's the role of the media in nurturing and bringing out that sense of community?

**Andrew Edwards**

Hmm, it's absolutely essential. We can ... A paper like the Echo can sense the feeling of a

community at any given time, usually driven by an incident but...or an issue. But we can see ... With Rhys Jones's murder we actually saw and felt that there was a massive feeling amongst communities that they wanted to do something, and yet there's a sort of a feeling of helplessness at

the same time because people are saying, "What can we do? What we can stop...What can we do to stop these sorts of things happening?" And there was a moment that made us realise that there was something we could when Rhys Jones's mother and father, who are staunch Everton supporters ... along with Rhys, were welcomed at Anfield, Liverpool's ground, on a match

day. They went onto the pitch and all the supporters, the Liverpool supporters, were singing You'll Never Walk Alone in his memory, and the Everton supporters were at the other end as well. They were, you know, the two sides, the two clubs couldn't be more opposed to each other but this was an amazing moment. And that's where our purple ribbon came from because

it's a merger of the two clubs' colours. And so, in answer to your question, nurturing that feeling in communities is essential. Being clever enough to pick it up and notice that it's there is crucial as well. But when you see that that sort of mood is there, we need to capture the moment and try to reflect how people feel in general in the way we cover things editorially. And so our

message was at the time we launched this campaign was that we know that the feeling out there now is that enough is enough. We know that together we can do something and this is our campaign to do it. And so Liverpool Unites was launched with four stated aims, which all campaigns have, but also that general feeling which is that 'wear the ribbon, wear your wristbands to

deliver a message that you've had enough'.

## **Cherie Booth**

Howard.

## **Professor Howard Williamson**

It raises all sorts of really interesting stuff, because that tragedy of that child getting killed in terms of a media campaign was perfect; he was kind of the totally undeserving victim of a tragedy and you've talked about the other ones that are sort of beyond the pale. And it's

really those are the ones that I regard as being beyond the pale that we're particularly interested in because...

**Andrew Edwards**

Right.

**Professor Howard Williamson**

...that experience of that child is so statistically, you know as a tragedy for Liverpool and for that family not [INAUDIBLE] for a second, but in terms of policy and statistic it's just a tiny, tiny, tiny [INAUDIBLE]. It's the undeserving, the ones that you know that aren't cuddly, that aren't gonna get onto the front of your newspaper that we're particularly interested in. Where this persistent offending, this persistent resort to criminality we're really, really interested in. What's your take about that in Merseyside? Is it better, is it getting worse, what? Give us some sense of that.

**Andrew Edwards**

Yeah. I still would argue...Well actually the latest crime figures prove that Liverpool is actually the most improving area as far as dealing with crime is concerned, so that's great news. And so I think it's quite important to understand that you are still dealing with a minority of people who are involved at the sharp end of crime. The majority of people want to get on with

living their lives in peace and enjoy living in their communities. To protect them we need to do – I agree with you – we need to really target what we can do to offer an alternative. And it really is about an alternative. It's fine going and locking people up, you know but when they're released they come out and they re-offend. And so the question that we're all asking ourselves is

'How do we avoid that re-offending? How do we get people back onto the straight and narrow?'

**Cherie Booth**

Andrew, that is fascinating. Thank you for helping us about how the media can actually be a positive force for good in this fight. Thank you.

**Andrew Edwards**

Thanks a lot.

**Fay Selvyn**

Thank you.

**Andrew Edwards**

Thanks, guys.