

How Jay turned his back on gang culture and found a real life

THIS week we speak to Jay Kemal, 31, of Chingford, who walked away from a life of crime in a gang and is now teaching young life skills.

What was life like growing up as a child?

I grew up in north London in a rough area in Tottenham and life was not easy.

I wanted to be a footballer and I wanted to make it professional, so I trained with the academy of Wimbledon FC, who were a Premiership football side back then.

Judgement day came, the day I hoped to get a professional contract, and I was rejected. At the age of 16,

my world had already collapsed.

My father did not know how to handle my pain and I thought I let him down, I had done something wrong.

I trained with Leyton Orient FC and I did better than last time but once again I suffered disappointment.

I had nothing, no grades, no prospects and no one to talk to. Teenagers do not talk to their parents.

The one thing I did know was that all my old friends were in a gang.

What was gang life like?

There were around 40 to 50 people in the gang and it felt like a unit, like a family. I had purpose again and I felt significant.

I was one of the younger members of the gang and I could only get involved with certain types of crime based on my age and time with the gang.

I would only steal, rob and fight. The older members they had weapons, knives and guns and they were selling drugs and dealing cars.

The leaders were always testing our speed and our bravery, it was not a nice time.

I would never go out anywhere

alone. In other towns or postcode areas, if someone questioned where you from and you stuttered or looked scared, then you could end up in a lot of trouble.

Then something happened that changed everything. I was walking through a park in broad daylight and I could see a friend of mine being held up by the shirt by another gang member and threatened.

My friend, who had a black eye, saw me and questioned me on the location of another gang member but I just kept walking with my head down.

How did that moment change things for you?

It proved there is no protection in gang life. I had a big awakening.

I had left a gang member in a time of need and I was worried about my own safety, not only other gangs but my own gang.

For a while I stayed indoors or I went outside covered up by wearing a hoody, a scarf and sunglasses.

When the situation had died



STREET LIFE: Jay Kemal

works with young people, aged 18 to 25, in getting them ready for life.

We want young people to have the right mind set that would make them responsible members of the community who earn, make an effort and create opportunities for themselves.

The aim of Life Ready is to make people employable because of their character not just their CV. Any employer would see that they are motivated, trustworthy, dedicated and reliable.

We have been running a 10 week course in Hackney College and we have been working with job centres and prisons.

We have taken young people into business boardrooms, provided them with workshop activities and classroom work and we have introduced them to sport. Anyone looking to get involved can call 020 7499 9874 or email info@lifeready.co.uk.

I understand you knew Mark Duggan (who was shot dead by police before the London Riots in 2011), is that correct?

I knew Mark for five years because we shared the same class at school.

We both went to Northumberland Park Community School, in Tottenham, which was rough at the time.

The only thing I knew about Mark was he was someone who had no fear in his eyes.

His death was a wake up call for me, a bit like a sliding doors moment. Could that have been me? I have asked that question to myself a lot recently.

In my opinion, the London Riots in 2011 were not caused by one man's death.

We needed to wake up and recognise the need to invest and support young people.

The attitudes of young people across the country, especially London, were like a volcano on the verge of exploding and Mark Duggan's death was the trigger that ignited it.

down, I decided I needed something to do with my life and I went looking for jobs.

I worked in the kitchen, in sales, in gyms and even football coaching. I was 20 and I had built up a CV in a short space of time.

I then managed to get a job in Liverpool Street in sales recruitment and hated it and I was sacked for not having the right attitude.

I remember feeling low and all I could think about was rejoining the gang.

Two things stopped me joining again - I met my wife and the mother of my two children and I was introduced to the Kabbalah Centre.

What is the Kabbalah Centre?

The centre is a charity that provides support for people, no matter the race, background or religion.

People involved with the centre receive spiritual support using Kabbalist tools and techniques.

Kabbalah is an ancient wisdom that reveals how the universe and life work.

On a literal level, the word Kabbalah means 'receiving'. It is the study of how to receive fulfilment in our lives and discover the hidden meaning of living.

The centre is a non-profitable organisation, a charity, and for me it was a spiritual gang that only focussed on positivity.

I had never had a role model but I found myself in the same room as people that I inspired to be like and I have since given many years of my life trying to change others.

The Kabbalah Centre started the Life Ready programme that I am now involved and teaching with.

How did you get involved with the programme?

Life Ready is a programme that

Competition

WIN! FAMILY TICKETS TO THE LONDON PET SHOW

WE have teamed up with the fantastic London Pet Show - a great day out for animal lovers of all ages - to give away 10 family tickets worth £54 each.

Meet a menagerie of more than 450 animals at the London Pet Show, sponsored by MyPetonline.co.uk, at Earls Court One on May 17 and 18, and enjoy spectacular animal action including showjumping bunnies, racing micropigs, colourful flying parrot displays, duck herding and doggy dancing.

From chinchillas to chickens, mice to micropigs, the London Pet Show features all sorts of animals that can be kept as pets, from the everyday to the exotic.

This year's London Pet Show also boasts a bevy of famous faces including Ben Fogle who is the lead judge and presenter of SuperDogs Live, an exciting showcase of the UK's most talented, heroic and entertaining dogs which will feature tricksters, doggy dancers and brave canines from across the country.

Steve Backshall, star of some of the UK's most exciting wildlife shows, will also be presenting some of the world's



C: Chris Packham

To enter the competition telephone your answer - A, B or C - to 0901 307 0204 along with your name, address, telephone number and email.

Alternatively text YAPET (space) followed by A, B or C, and your name, full address and email to 63333.

Calls cost 51p from a BT landline. Calls from other networks may vary and from mobiles will cost considerably more. Texts cost 50p plus your standard network rates. If you do not wish to receive details on any other products or services, please text EXIT at the end of your message.

Lines close on Thursday, April 24, 2014. Entries received after the closing date will not be counted but may still be charged.

Service Provider: JMedia UK Limited, SW4 7BX. Tel: 0844 800 1188.

weirdest animals from across the globe - from snakes and spiders to creepy crawlies and reptiles - during a thrilling display in the show's Super Theatre, while Springwatch presenter Chris Packham will be sharing tips and ways to keep your dog, cat or rabbit free from the itchy problem of fleas and ticks in the Pet Health Centre with mypetonline.co.uk.

For more information and tickets for the London Pet Show visit www.londonpetshow.co.uk

To win one of 10 family tickets to the show, which admit two adults and two children aged five to 15 (under 5s go free), just answer the following question.

Q: Who is the lead judge of London Pet Show's SuperDogs Live?

**A: Steve Backshall
B: Ben Fogle**

