

Helping troubled children get off the streets and on the ball



Jill Sherman

Victor Alaneme was stabbed in the face when he was 18 after a row over a mobile phone with a local youth. The

wound, which needed 72 stitches, still divides his left cheek and the incident sent him spiralling into depression, leaving him scared and isolated.

"I was in hospital for three or four days. It made me feel very angry at the time," said Victor, now 31. "All my mates were going out and having a good time but I was scared. I stayed indoors and became a recluse for months."

Five years ago violence came back to

haunt him when his younger brother Christopher, also aged 18, was stabbed to death by a gang of boys who chased him after shouting racist remarks.

"He went out with a group of friends in Sheerness. He got heckled by some guys there and they chased him for whatever reason and stabbed him and a bystander who helped him got stabbed too. But he survived and my brother died and that was it," said Victor, struggling to control his emotion.



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Victor Alaneme with some of the 520 young Greenhouse Bethwin footballers

The irony was that his mother moved away from Penge, southeast London, where they had lived since their arrival from Nigeria in 1984, to protect her family from gang activity.

But things have changed dramatically for Victor, who tells his story on a floodlit pitch at the Greenhouse Bethwin Football Club in Peckham, South London. Greenhouse is one of the charities chosen to benefit this year from *The Times* Christmas Appeal.

Victor went from job to job for years after his recovery, feeling generally out of place. But after being told he was "brilliant with kids" while working at a leisure centre, he eventually got involved with Greenhouse. The charity runs the Bethwin club's 27 teams for boys, girls and young adults mainly

from disadvantaged backgrounds. It believes that sport can transform lives and keep vulnerable children out of gangs and off the streets. Gang slogans or uniforms are kept off the pitch. Only the yellow and blue G slogan is allowed on sportswear, symbolic of "the Good Gang," said Victor, who has been trained by the charity in mentoring and working with difficult children.

The key, he added, was to instill strict discipline and send troublemakers packing. Children who are late or misbehave get a match ban and those that play up at school are not picked for the team.

A group of supporters led by the Alan Cristea Gallery will match donations made to Greenhouse through *The Times* Appeal.

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