



Football legend Ian Wright is backing the Mayor of London's call for more male mentors in the capital. Ian will front a new poster campaign urging people to sign up and make a real difference to a young person's life. The new posters will appear from today on the Tube and encourage people to sign up online for the rewarding scheme. Mayor Boris Johnson said: "I refuse to give up on the so called 'hard to reach' young men, who can easily drift into trouble from an early age. Thousands of young people dream of an illustrious football career like Ian Wright and to have his support on mentoring is tremendous. Ian knows first hand the hurdles mentors face with youngsters who can initially be sceptical but soon unlock their potential with the right help. I have met many young offenders who are bright and able but have simply strayed onto the wrong path. I want to stop as many vulnerable young men as possible being lured into anti social behaviour, and I truly believe that having a strong male role model is key to achieving this. My plea to the men of London is simple - please register your interest and come and find out how you can volunteer as a mentor and make an amazing difference."

Ian was mentored in his teens, before becoming a professional footballer, and he is now a mentor to a number of youngsters.

Ian said: "There's nothing better than seeing someone you've mentored starting to change, it's literally the best feeling in the world. This scheme focuses on young men in some of the toughest parts of London, who really need some guidance. As a mentor, you need to understand what these young men are going through. It's not easy, you're not just going to start talking to them and they'll immediately change their ways, it takes time to break habits. You need to stick with them as well. You can't come in and say I want to help, then when the going gets tough abandon them. That's exactly what they don't need. You're there so they know someone cares for them no matter what.

"The first time I was mentored was by a guy who used to take me to football. I didn't really like it and thought he was getting into my business but now I understand he was just trying to help. Fortunately, I ended up on the right path playing football, but even in the world of professional football, I realised that nothing comes easy. In my position, I can tell people it's all a case of hard work.

"The guys I mentor right now include some ex-offenders, and some aspiring footballers, and I tell them, I won't give up on you as long as you're trying to change yourself. As hard as it is, you've got to give yourself the best possible chance to have a decent life.

"This scheme will really give young people the chance to learn from other people's experiences and the mentors could literally change someone's life. I'd advise everyone to take that first step now and find out what difference you can make."

In addition to Ian Wright, the Mayor is working in partnership with Ray Lewis, Richard Taylor and a selection of expert community advisers on his mentoring scheme. Since August, over 400 men have registered their interest in becoming involved and many have attending City Hall workshops to find out more information. To register your interest visit www.london.gov.uk/mentoring.

The Mayor hopes to recruit more mentors through a series of forthcoming Community Conversations events aimed at getting to communities more involved in long term initiatives to tackle serious youth violence. The first community conversation will take place in Croydon on 14th December.