

Commando Chef - cooking with the Royal Marines to engage young people

Using cooking to engage and motivate young people and young adults to deter them from committing serious violent crimes.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Diversion
Topic	Knife and gun crime Violence (other) Community engagement
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Region	South East
Partners	Police Community safety partnership Education

Key details

Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2020
Scale of initiative	National
Target group	Adults Children and young people Offenders Workforce

Aim

The aims of Commando Chef are to:

- use cooking to engage and inspire young people to think about their futures
- increase young people's insight into serious violent crime
- encourage healthy lifestyle choices

The next stage of the work aims to consider how the initiative can be used to secure and wrap opportunities around some of the most vulnerable young people, offering training, qualifications and job opportunities.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of Commando Chef are to:

- captivate young adults and provide a visibly positive atmosphere
- observe behaviour improvements such as individuals communicating, creating, engaging and participating – watching a young person's face when they have made a curry or healthy snack themselves
- encourage young people to make the recipes at home
- encourage young people to make positive life choices
- increase understanding, knowledge and awareness around serious violent crime

- reduce the number of knife crime incidents

Description

Commando Chef sessions

A Royal Marine (who used to be at risk of drugs and gangs) called 'the Commando Chef' runs cooking demonstrations and delivers key messages about making positive life decisions.

Throughout the sessions, young people get to cook the recipe themselves.

A session can include a focus on one or all of the following:

- motivation
- inspiration
- empowerment and success through cooking for themselves
- healthy lifestyle choices
- safe knife skills – 'knife in the kitchen not on the street' tag line – now also using 'pointless knives' which don't have a sharp point to reduce puncture wounds
- communication, discipline and teamworking skills through cooking
- engagement with peers, police and partners

In terms partnership working, the idea of using the Commando Chef to spread key crime prevention messages came jointly from Kent Police and the Kent Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). Kent Police and the VRU brief the Commando Chef on the crime reduction messaging they want at events. The events are organised by the VRU.

Resourcing and costs

For resource requirements, it takes the VRU a couple of hours to make logistical arrangements such as arranging the venue, one to two hours for food shopping and one hour for setup on the day. The sessions are booked directly with the Royal Marines. Attendance is usually arranged by the venue. The local police beat team or community unit will support the event, either in uniform or plain clothes and participate to help increase bonding and engagement.

The 'Commando Chef' model has been used in different venues including schools, youth clubs, referral units, sports clubs, veterans' associations, on stage at planned fairs and fetes, in police

stations and via internet streaming. The model has also been used at No. 10 Downing Street.

The sessions can run for groups of around 10 attendees, typically for more at-risk groups where more focused time is spent with the attendees up to whole-school assemblies which then split into break-out groups.

In terms of costs, the 'Commando Chef' is funded by the Royal Marines. Either the police or venue provide the basic ingredients that consist of, at most, wraps, vegetables and chicken or turkey breasts. The ingredients are a low-cost purchase for the sessions and are resourced from local budgets or violence reduction funding depending on the audience. Dietary requirements, mobility and access are all considered, and adaptable on a session-by-session basis.

In terms of future plans for this initiative, the next elements to look at progressing are streaming individuals into training and jobs. Promotion and public relations (PR) of the event is replicated by both the Royal Marines, the venue and Kent Police.

Overall impact

The impact of the intervention has been measured in terms of the popularity of the input. Attendees talk positively about the event and also continue to cook, according to social media posts, comments on police posts, surveys and staff feedback. The Royal Marine who runs the sessions has his own strong social media following which is echoed by the local force social media.

The Police Digital Service's Knowledge Hub platform received positive feedback for the '2023 wellbeing week' Commando Chef video series.

Kent Police have used this input as a healthy eating and motivational input to officers in the force and just left out the knife crime messaging aspect. Following this, an entire team went out to purchase smoothie blenders for five-minute breakfast smoothies.

The Commando Chef was a feature on a Royal Navy and Royal Marines media campaign about 'service'. The Commando Chef's input about helping young people and 'knife in the kitchen not on the street' was the most successful component of the campaign – with over 70,000 views. The campaign was shown in cinemas and on a Piccadilly Circus billboard. In terms of impact for the police, this was effectively free police messaging by the Ministry of Defence.

The Commando Chef has been to No. 10 Downing Street to work with the Prime Minister's wife, and the work of the Commando Chef was presented to the Home Secretary in January 2024.

Inspired by the Commando Chef's work, Kent Police are designing an idea to apply the same concept locally. This will involve using a local cooking experience school and inviting local businesses along to participate, talent spot and consider future careers, employment or apprenticeships.

The scheme is still being used nationally and locally and planned for further use over next 12 months. The force intend to develop the scheme into Project Chrysalis with the Royal Marines which will take individuals towards experience opportunities with the military.

Learning

- Food and simple cooking is a brilliant vehicle for engagement.
- Working in close partnership with the military can be used for crime prevention and diversion at little cost to policing.
- The success of this initiative has been partly due to the brand of the Commando Chef relying on an individual marine's story and their personality. However, there is something in the delivery mechanism which has potential to be replicated or inspire spin off projects.
- Spin off projects could use similar mechanisms to develop a good engagement session into a consistent diversion programme, delivering sustainable and volume results.
- The partnership working between police, military and Commando Chef has opened doors to venues and audiences.
- For others looking to use this initiative or a similar concept, the force emphasises the importance of considering the following:
 - finding a provider or venue that has the relevant food industry qualifications and equipment
 - the portability of equipment being used
 - having funding available for ingredients
- The force has found that partners initially did not fully appreciate the benefits and value of this work until they experienced it first-hand.

Best available evidence

Currently, the [Crime Reduction Toolkit](#) does not include any best-available evidence on an intervention similar to the Commando Chef programme. See [Knife crime: a problem solving guide](#) for practical and evidence-informed advice on how to reduce local knife crime.

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Tags

Community engagement Knife crime