

Cornerstone VR Sponsors Muay Thai Athlete Gene Smith to Support Youth Empowerment and Combat Knife Crime

Tuesday 8 July, 2025

According to the Youth Endowment Fund's *Children, Violence and Vulnerability Report 5*, children most vulnerable to violence, such as those with special educational needs, school exclusions, or gang involvement, are less likely to engage in team sports, but more likely to take part in activities like combat sports, volunteering, and outdoor adventure. These findings highlight the need for tailored, engaging alternatives that speak to their experiences and offer a sense of purpose.

That's why [Cornerstone VR](#), leading provider of trauma-informed VR solutions, is proud to sponsor rising Muay Thai athlete Gene Smith, whose personal journey from risk to resilience embodies the potential of sport to transform lives.

At just 16, Gene became the youngest ranked professional Muay Thai fighter in the UK. But his success was shaped by hardship: growing up in a community where knife crime was commonplace, he witnessed friends being stabbed and had knives pulled on him personally.

"Being in the gym every night is what kept me out of trouble," Gene explains. *"I've had friends stabbed right in front of me. Thai boxing gave me something to focus on, and now I want to offer that same lifeline to others."*

K-Star Gym now acts as a safe space for young people, many of whom stay from after school until late evening. Here, they're learning discipline, confidence, and community.

"Research shows combat sports can play a powerful role in prevention for those most at risk," says Serena Hadi, Head of Operations and Practice at Cornerstone VR. *"Gene's work gives vulnerable young people structure, connection, and hope...exactly what's needed."*

As part of the partnership, Gene is also championing Cornerstone VR's immersive virtual reality films, which explore the emotional impact of knife carrying through the eyes of those affected.

The 360° film series is used by professionals and young people in 1-1 and group interventions, facilitating open, guided conversations on real-life risks. Following VR interventions, 100% of young people surveyed reported a better understanding of the risks they may face, increased willingness to seek help from adults, and greater motivation to make safer choices for themselves.

"I think the VR films are powerful because they don't just show what happens, but they show what it does to families and friends," says Gene. *"That emotional truth is what young people really connect with."*

Gene Smith and Cornerstone VR are using sport and storytelling to reach those who need it most and to help rewrite futures.

Find out more about Cornerstone VR: www.cornerstonevr.co.uk

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Notes to Editors:

About Cornerstone VR: Cornerstone VR, part of The Antser Group, is a Birmingham-based tech-for-good company at the forefront of providing trauma-informed virtual reality solutions across the health, education, sports and social care sectors. With a mission to improve outcomes for society's most vulnerable, Cornerstone VR empowers users with immersive experiences that enhance empathy and understanding of early-life trauma and societal influences.

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