

Winner's son gets all-clear

A MUM and her family have a reason to celebrate this summer. Sara Hunt, who won the Carer award in 2008, looks after two sons who were diagnosed with a rare genetic disease.



JOY: Sara Hunt

But her youngest son Ayden, 10, has been given the all-clear after a bone marrow transplant. He needed the treatment to cure the illness that has left his older brother Alex, 17, paralysed and unable to speak or see.

The family is now able to head off on an activity holiday in Dartmoor for the first time in three years.

In 2001 Sara's older son was struck down with the neuro-muscular illness adrenoleukodystrophy (ALD) - and his brother was diagnosed with it in 2007. But doctors were able to reverse Ayden's disease with the bone marrow transplant two years ago.

Sara, who runs ALD Life charity shops in Sydenham and Penge to fund research into her son's condition, said: "We found out last week that he had been given the all-clear, 100 per cent.

"That means that everything is fantastic and wonderful.

"And now we're off for a family activity holiday for the first time in years.

"Alex is only just well enough to get out and about after his eight-hour operation last September."

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Category:
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CLOSING DATE FOR ENTRIES IS AUGUST 20

Last chance to nominate your hero!

Mum encourages teens to aim high



By **LINDSAY BURNS**

A MOTHER'S shock at a spate of teen killings prompted her to set up a charity where high-flying professionals encourage young people to lead successful lives.

Leila Thomas, who has a six-year-old son, was so alarmed at the violent deaths of 26 teenagers in London during 2007 that she set up Urban Synergy in Devonshire Drive, Greenwich.

The project helps give 11- to 18-year-olds a better chance of achieving their potential.

She said the starting point was the African proverb "it takes a village to raise a child".

She has since recruited dozens of professionals to mentor the young people and encourage them to achieve their goals.

Professionals

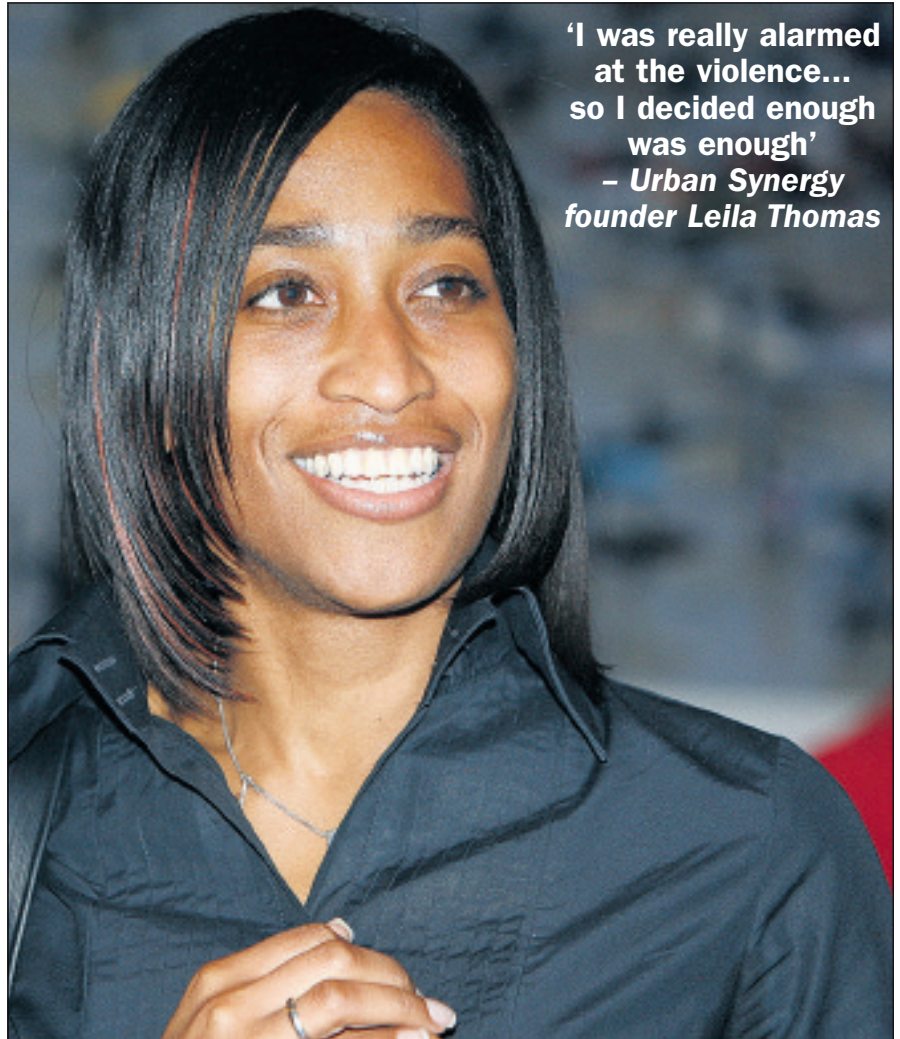
Doctors, lawyers, bankers, scientists, pilots and media and entertainment professionals have so far worked with more than 1,000 youngsters.

Urban Synergy has now been nominated for a *South London Press* Our Heroes Award in the Community Project category.

The awards, which recognise the achievements of South Londoners, culminates in a gala ceremony in November at the Southbank headquarters of sponsors Shell.

Mrs Thomas, from Lewisham, who is a project manager for news agency Reuters, said: "I was really alarmed at the violence and also the disenfranchisement affecting young people in the community. So I decided enough was enough.

"I created an organisation to join forces with a group of like-minded professionals who had the same vision and passion to



'I was really alarmed at the violence... so I decided enough was enough'
- *Urban Synergy founder Leila Thomas*

INSPIRED: Leila Thomas set up Urban Energy

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help support and encourage youngsters to succeed.

"My idea was to bring back the village mentality and determination to help youngsters achieve their aspirations.

"I hope to build the self-respect of those we mentor. Who knows, maybe some of these young people will in turn become future

role models."

She said the charity has made a massive difference in the community.

Many children who have been mentored by the charity attend St Matthew Academy in St Joseph's Vale, Blackheath.

Vice principal Martin Nirsimloo said: "The impact

that Urban Synergy has had on our school community is simply awe-inspiring.

"To see some of our most disengaged students focusing on their futures and engaging with inspirational successful figures was invigorating for me as an educator."

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Our Heroes 2010 categories

YOUNG AMBASSADOR

For under-25s who have overcome adversity, helped others, or shown outstanding ability in education, sport and other activities

COMMUNITY CAMPAIGNER

For a volunteer whose determination and hard work has made a difference to the lives of those people around them

COMMUNITY PROJECT

For a grassroots group that has improved the lives of others, with a special award to recognise the growth of green schemes in South London

ROLE MODEL

For those charismatic and inspirational members of society who help point others in a positive direction

CARER

For a selfless adult or child

who has given their time and energy to care for others

FUNDRAISER/ VOLUNTEER

For people who strive to support charities or community projects by giving their time or raising money

COURAGE AND DETERMINATION

For three adults and three children who have overcome adversity or shown bravery and

STAR OF SOUTH LONDON

For an outstanding entry, chosen by the *South London Press* and Shell.

The Star Of South London will win £750. Overall winners of each category will receive £500 and runners-up £150.

Children in the **Courage and Determination** category will receive special gifts.