

# Ten years after Ben's murder, there's so much more to do out there ... all we can do is try

Brooke Kinsella tells **Justin Davenport** that the heartbreak never fades but she hopes her brother would be proud of her fight against knives

"PEOPLE say that time is a great healer but it never is." Ten years after losing her beloved brother Ben to a knife attack in north London, Brooke Kinsella says she will always live with the heartbreak.

The anti-knife campaigner added: "I still cannot quite comprehend that I have not seen my little brother for 10 years, yet at the same time it feels like it was only yesterday."

The murder of Ben, 16, in an unprovoked assault in Islington devastated her close-knit family and led to her devoting her life to a charity in his name to fight the scourge of knife crime.

Today, speaking after the recent surge in violence in London, the former EastEnders star said she hoped people would mark the 10th anniversary of his death in a positive way—but there were moments when she has despaired about news of murders and stabbings.

"I am marking the 10-year anniversary of losing my little brother and I would give everything to stand up and say, 'Look at what we did, at least we have made a difference,' but we are far from



*'There is no quick fix. It needs education, funding, zero tolerance and a long-term plan'*

Brooke Kinsella

being able to say that at the moment, that makes me very sad," she said.

"I am petrified, it is scary out there, my family and many other families who have lost people have been working so hard to try and make a difference.

"It does make you think about just giving up, and is there any point, but then you wonder what sort of situation we would be in if our families were not doing this work. All we can do is try. This is the 10th anniversary and we are trying to be positive and celebrate his life."

The Ben Kinsella Trust has launched a "10 for Ben" initiative to get schoolchildren to do 10 acts of kindness in his name. "I think there is a lot of cruelty in the world at the moment so we want to put some kindness back into it. Hundreds and hundreds of schoolkids have signed up which is wonderful."

Ben, a popular student at Holloway School who hoped to become a graphic designer, was out celebrating the end of his GCSEs before the murder on June 29, 2008. He had no gang connections but was attacked in the street by three men following an unrelated row in a pub that evening. His killers were jailed for life with a minimum tariff of 19 years.

After his death hundreds marched through north London in a protest against street violence. In 2009, amid anger over Ben's murder, justice secretary Jack Straw announced the minimum sentence for a knife murder would



be raised from 15 to 25 years. The measure was dubbed "Ben's Law".

Ms Kinsella said the grief was "never-ending" and Friday's anniversary would be "heartbreaking". The family will have a quiet day on Friday but the next day a 10k walk through Islington is planned, and a memorial mass will be held in the same church his funeral took place at.

The Ben Kinsella Trust has teamed up with fashion label Never Fully Dressed to launch a T-shirt in aid of the charity. It also hopes to expand an exhibition at Finsbury Library aimed at schoolchildren, which features a life-size prison cell and actors to send a message warning of the dangers of carrying knives.

"Education is what we do, we believe prevention is better than cure," said Ms Kinsella, who is now a talent agent. "More than 13,000 children have seen

the exhibition and we hope to replicate it across the country. We have had some wonderful feedback, we have had young people send us stories about how they have turned their life around since seeing the exhibition, which is wonderful to hear."

Ms Kinsella recently worked on a hard-hitting knife crime storyline for EastEnders and found it difficult to watch. "Every time I talk about Ben it is reliving it, it is extremely hard." On what can be done to tackle knife crime she said: "There are so many reasons why this is going on. There is not one magical answer. It needs long-term investment. Society needs to accept this

**Grief:** Brooke Kinsella at the scene of the killing of her brother in 2008, and today, left. The murder of the 16-year-old, inset, led to a protest march in Islington, far left

is a problem. I admit I used to read about knife crime and think, 'That's sad,' and turn the page. You think it's never going to affect you, it's not my world, but sadly it is everybody's world right now. It can get anyone at any time.

My family and many others are proof.

"There is no quick fix. Giving money to projects that last for six months to a year does not help, it needs education, funding, zero tolerance and a long term plan." She praised the Glasgow model of using a public health approach to tackle violence.

She said Ben would have been honoured that 10 years on he is remembered by so many. "In a selfish way that's why I started this. I could not bear for him to be forgotten. He was a little normal 16-year-old boy and he has been instrumental in some major changes. I hope he would be proud, I think he would be." To get a T-shirt visit neverfully-dressed.co.uk