

Aims

Positive Futures is a national sports-based social inclusion programme for young people, aged 10-16, offering opportunities to engage in employment, education and training.

The aims and objectives of Positive Futures are to use sport as a vehicle to deliver anti-social behaviour and drug-misuse programmes.

Location

The initiative is located within the Wear Valley District Council area which is predominantly rural in character, the focus is on the identified three wards of Coundon, Woodhouse Close and St Helens. These wards contain ex-coal mining villages with aging Local Authority housing stock. The initiatives activities are delivered 'on-the-ground' in a range of locations from fishing ponds to leisure centres and school premises and Outward Bound Centres.

The Intervention Strategy

Staffing

NRF funding co-funds the Coordinator's salary in partnership with Durham Constabulary.

Funding

Positive Futures funds the delivery of activities within the initiative. In addition to the £25,000 NRF allocated in 2003-4, Positive Futures is funded by the Home Office, the Football Foundation and Sport England.

Operating method

Referrals into Positive Futures come from the Partner organisations and originally the Police Computer System for the 'Core 50' young people most at risk of offending/re-offending. Outreach and detached work can be used to contact the young people and engage them into the initiative.

Positive Futures operates parallel to the Sports Action Zone. Delivery occurs in locally based clubs and facilities assisted by professional sports people and Wear Valley District Council Physical Activities Officers. An on-going concern for managers is the lack of sufficient numbers of coaches or volunteers with or without coaching qualifications to meet local needs. Some of the young people participating in the provided activities are

unaware they are participating under the umbrella of Positive Futures and the Co-ordinator sees no reason why they should be so identified as in some areas such a referral is viewed as a stigma. The Positive Futures fifty young people are thus 'buried' within the 800 or so other young people who also access the services of the Physical Activities Officers.

The coordinator post utilizing a serving Police Officer and the mode of operation of Positive Futures within the area is innovative so far as the Co-ordinator is aware. Managers view a key strength of the Positive Futures initiative locally as the status the Co-ordinator has within the community as a serving police officer and the experiences and skills which he can thus utilize in working within the community and with young people. The initiative is ahead of other Positive Future initiatives in County Durham in the development of its linkages to other initiatives/programmes and projects, the approach is to work with other agencies and support them but not to fund these groups. The initiatives advanced place is in part due to the Co-ordinator being the first Co-ordinator in post and as a consequence the Wear Valley Positive Futures initiative is a pilot for other Positive Futures initiatives within the area, as this initiative tends to encounter potential problems first.

This status also means that the initiative is the first one to deliver outcomes.

Within sessions coaching requires careful structuring. Initially, coaching should involve no more than supervision of 'play'. Over the sessions coaching as such should be carefully introduced according to the ability range of the group. There should not be a focus only on the most able.

Through basketball delivery, peer coaching has been introduced to the initiative. Three qualified young people (14-17 years old)

delivered the sessions under the supervision of a Senior Coach.

This had a double benefit: (a) for Positive Futures participants who were exposed to similar aged role models (b) for the young coaches as they gained experience in working with a group of young people whom they would have not otherwise taught.

A range of activities have been/are on offer including: Basketball, American Football, Cheerleading, Netball, Outward Bound, Extreme Mountain Biking (in Hamsterley Forest) and football (amongst many others.)

By their nature sessions are well structured and disciplined. The Positive Futures Co-ordinator also works one-to-one with the young people and has advised on range of issues affecting them, for example giving up smoking or expressing an interest in returning to education when excluded. The young people are aware of the Co-ordinator's role as a Police Officer and were initially anti-police (as some parents and areas were) but now engage with him.

Issues relating to anti-social behaviour and drugs misuse are dealt with in Positive Futures by indicating the direct impact of these behaviours. For example, the young people are extremely keen on basketball but they could not play in the official leagues as there is an 'anti-doping' clause for team members which if some members of the team were tested may be positive and result in their expulsion. To highlight this issue the young people were shown National League Registration Licence, which if they aspired to play at a higher level would have to be signed which could potentially cause problems. It is in ways such as this that drugs education occurs, showing the consequences of an action rather than a direct 'No' approach and as such, has more of an effect.

The initiative is exposing the young people to opportunities they otherwise would never have had for example, having talks and training from professional sportsmen. One professional basketball player from the Newcastle Eagles came in and gave a talk to the young people about his life and background and about how he entered sport as a diversionary activity from the events within the neighborhood/his family. At the end of the session (and continuing) the young people look up to this individual as a positive role model, this was over one year ago and the young people still talk about what he said. This is a way of helping to restore safety in the community.

There is an element of education in the sessions for young people who are permanently excluded from school in that Level I football coaching is being introduced.



Positive Futures

Contact:

Ian Hirst

e-mail: i.hirst@wearvalley.gov.uk

NRF Priority:

Crime/Education/Employment/Health

NRF Authority:

Wear Valley

NRF Funding Level:

Low



WEAR
VALLEY
DISTRICT COUNCIL

PTO for additional information

Lead Agent:

Durham Constabulary, Wear Valley District Council, Teesdale District Council

Main Partners:

Youth Offending Team (YOT), Youth Inclusion Programmes (Wear Valley District Council area), Durham Connexions Service, Social Services (Durham County Council), Education Welfare (County Durham Local Education Authority)

Location:

Facilities across the three identified NRF wards of Coundon, Woodhouse Close, St Helens and Local Authority area

Main achievements:

Engagement of young people into the promotion of a healthy lifestyle

Anti-drugs input to the young people

New opportunity provision to the young people

Given the above activities it can be seen Positive Futures has had an impact on 'Sport in the Community' development engaging difficult/hard to reach young people in deprived/disadvantaged areas.

The initiative is a part of an external evaluation of the Sports Action Zone being conducted by the University of Durham.

Achievements of the Intervention

Main achievements

- ◆ Engagement of young people in the promotion of a healthy lifestyle
- ◆ Anti-drugs input to the young people
- ◆ New opportunity provision to the young people.

Of all the young people within the Positive Futures initiative 81% have not returned to the notice of the Police post-referral.

In terms of social engagement in community activities, young people involved in Positive Futures continue to attend Basketball sessions at the traditionally 'dead time' of 8pm on a Friday night, illustrating a commitment to this activity. This level of social commitment was further illustrated when an 'American Sports Week' was run across the area in Summer 2004: a team from one of the target wards made their own way to each venue to be part of the roadshow event.

There is a double impact to the outcomes through the dual working of Positive Futures and the Council Physical Activities Officers.

An American Football group have gone to Birmingham to play in matches and a group of Positive Futures young people have been entered into both Kitted and Flag American Football National League and two of these young people have been identified by coaching staff and will be invited to attend Great Britain Trials in the near future.

Mainstreaming Strategy

The Co-ordinator would wish his NRF salary element to be mainstreamed to Durham Constabulary and his role, as it exists at the moment, continued. Managers view the Coordinators background as both a serving police officer and a well-connected and established sporting coach as essential in the formation and maintenance of the innovative approach of this initiative.

The Learning Curve

It should be almost essential when setting up such an initiative that the Co-ordinator or a team member should possess a sports/coaching training certificate. There is a local County-wide shortage of such individuals. However, as indicated earlier, a key feature of the success of this initiative is the skills, background and experiences of the Co-ordinator as both a serving police officer and a well-established coach.

A new initiative needs to 'hit the ground running' with a few activities planned for the first few weeks to immediately engage the young people after this initial stage of development activity consultation can then be introduced on possible activities with the young people. If an approach is adopted of immediate consultation it is possible to end up with a 'wish-list' of activities none of which occurs, this will have a negative effect on the young people attending the initiative and will impact on the outcomes the initiative is designed to achieve.

Given that some of the initiative's activities occur on premises from which some of the young people may have been previously banned/excluded or not accepted due to the possession of a previous criminal record it can be somewhat problematic for the young person to be a part of the activity. This problem, however, can be addressed by prior negotiation or by Positive Futures acceptance of the young people concerned and the provision of alternative activities for them by Positive Futures.

Key Lessons

Honesty with the young people is vital. This can be problematic in some ways as the more one works with the young people and is seen by them to be delivering on one's word the more the young people place the worker on a pedestal. This can be precarious at times.

As indicated above true consultation with the young people is vital to the success of the initiative even if, in the early stages, it means there is a limited, imposed, range of activities.

The establishment of a wide-ranging personal contact network to establish links with appropriate facilities, organisations, groups and individuals. The ability to communicate across the spectrum from G-ONE officials to very poor families is vital. In working in these areas and with young people it is essential not to be seen as aloof but as someone with whom they can easily communicate with.

Exit strategies for the young person leaving the initiative are problematic. The ideal strategy would be for the young person to remain socially engaged by joining a local sports club. However, there needs to be a funding provision post-Positive Futures in a 'community pot' for either the club or the young person to purchase any necessary sports/safety equipment. The expense of such a move would be far less than the expense of the young person returning to anti-social behaviours and being tracked through the justice system.

Post 2006 could be a major problem. If the funding were to end there would be no way to deliver the initiative and the young people would have been socially engaged and committed to sporting activities (which would impact on NRF Health Floor Targets) would then be returned to their previous lack of facilities.

Contact Details

Ian Hirst
Positive Futures Co-ordinator
Wear Valley District Council
Crook
County Durham

e-mail: i.hirst@wearvalley.gov.uk