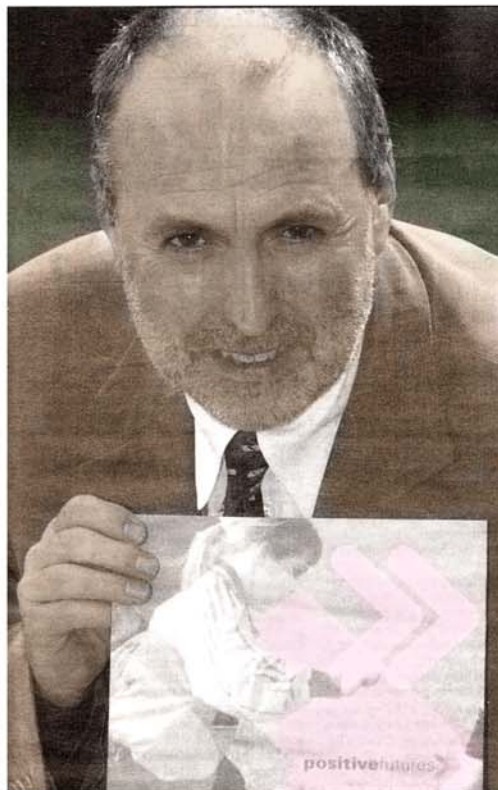


The reclaimed proceeds of crime funding project

'Drugs money' that is turning lives around



FUNDING: Assets from convicted drug dealers are helping Paul O'Hara's Positive Futures team steer youngsters away from crime

There is a look of satisfaction on Paul O'Hara's face.

Maybe it's the case studies he is reading through – evidence that the Positive Futures project launched in Keighley a year ago to help steer young people away from a life of crime and drugs is making a difference.

Or perhaps it's more to do with the Home Office's recent confirmation that Paul, and the multi-agency team charged with delivering Positive Futures, are able to continue their vital work after being granted a further windfall.

The irony is that this handout is being funded through the proceeds of drugs crimes.

Paul, manager of the city's Youth Offending Team – which is a partnership between Bradford Council, social services, police, Education Bradford, West Yorkshire Probation Service and the health service – says the cash is the result of new powers given to the police and courts, enabling them to pump funds from confiscated drugs assets into crime prevention programmes.

It is believed to be the first time this type of cash has been used to fund an initiative in Bradford.

"Young people are well aware that drugs are around in Bradford, as they are in any major city. We have to help train them to be aware of the risks of taking drugs and to encourage them not to get involved as they can lead to a life of crime," says Paul.

"I'd also like to see more action to confiscate even greater amounts of assets from drug dealers.



A project partly funded through confiscated drugs assets is helping to steer Bradford's youngsters away from a life of crime. **SALLY CLIFFORD** reports.

"I think this is a very good initiative which sends a very strong signal that crime does not pay."

That's a message that Paul and his team are keen to get across to the vulnerable youngsters being targeted by Positive Futures, a nationwide Government initiative aiming to divert young people away from crime and drug use by getting them involved in sport.

"It encourages young people to get involved in a variety of sporting activities, which promote healthy living, drug awareness programmes and citizenship training," explains Paul.

He goes through a few of the Keighley case studies, brimming with positive comments from parents and children who have benefited from the project – they are proof that it's working.

"An 11-year-old from Keighley who was on the programme because of concerns she might become involved in drugs, was introduced to boxing and dance and, within weeks, she had received a trophy from the boxing club," says Paul.

"While on the project she also showed an improvement in discipline. There was a positive comment made by her family as to what she'd gained while being on the project.

"Then there's the 15-year-old boy who had a history of being very aggressive and, because of that, was not able to mix with other young people.

"Through the project he was introduced to a mentor and formed a positive relationship with him,

which helped him to learn how to cope with difficult situations and become less aggressive. His mentor also encouraged him to take up football."

These are just some of the success stories. Since the Millennium launch of Positive Futures, the scheme has helped 25,000 ten to 19-year-olds across the UK stay on track to a brighter future.

And with the extra £375,000 windfall winging its way to Bradford over the next three years, the project is now being extended to other parts of the city, including Holme Wood estate.

The age range has also been widened to include 17 to 19-year-olds.

"Some of these young people who are at risk may not be doing well at school, they may be worrying residents in their neighbourhood through their anti-social behaviour, but through this project they will be encouraged to join sporting activities and clubs.

"They can also access the youth club provision available in that area," says Paul.

The scheme is also helping youngsters to lead healthier lifestyles.

"We know more and more young people are less active and more overweight, and part of the programme will be to encourage them to get into fitness activities.

So any future finance will bring more benefits to the city.

"We are very pleased, it demonstrates the partnership work which is taking place between the

statutory organisations and the voluntary sector," says Paul.

"And it very much fits in with Bradford Council's safer community strategy which is aimed at tackling social exclusion and offending behaviour."

Bradford Council leader, Councillor Margaret Eaton, who is chairman of the Safer Communities Partnership, welcomes the scheme.

"I hope this will motivate them (young people) to take more interest in their health and stop them becoming bored and getting involved in anti-social behaviour," she said.

Chief Inspector David Young, community safety co-ordinator for Bradford district, said: "We welcome any additional funding that helps us address these issues.

"It's particularly pleasing to know that the proceeds of crime are actually being used to combat crime itself."

The Positive Futures schemes are supported by partnership contributions from a range of local agencies including: Youth Service, Joint Activities Service, Youth Offending Team, Social Services, West Yorkshire Police, local schools and the Education Department, Connexions, Bradford Drug and Alcohol Team, Anti-Social Behaviour Order Teams, Sport and Leisure Department, Airedale Primary Care Trust, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Sport England, and Keighley Cougars and Bradford Bulls who are helping to provide some of the sporting programmes.

e-mail: editorial.features@bradford.newsquest.co.uk