

Community youth project contributes to reduction in anti-social behaviour say police

An Edinburgh community youth project set up to help disadvantaged kids being targeted by criminal gangs has been expanded into other parts of the city after police said it “contributed to a 25 per cent reduction in antisocial behaviour”.

‘Friday Night Lights’ was launched at Leith Community Sports Hub and has been hailed as a huge success one year on.

The initiative invites youngsters aged nine to 14 to take part in sports activities and build their communication skills on Friday evenings as an alternative to being out on the streets.

And it is now being offered to youngsters in Niddrie and Gorgie as well.

The club was started up after community police officers became increasingly concerned about a “rise in criminal activity among youngsters”.

As well as organising games and providing food at the

sessions, youth workers from local charities YMCA and Pilmeny Development Project build relationships with participants and can offer them further support through other services available through their organisations.

The scheme is made possible through funding from Places for People Scotland, while the Sport Hub is run by sportscotland and funded by the National Lottery.

An update to Edinburgh Council's education committee said young people have gone on to employment directly linked to the local charities involved.

It said: "Our evaluation for year 1 showed us that: Our project contributed to a 25 per cent reduction in antisocial behaviour in the local beat areas where our young people live; 86 per cent have improved their connections with community police since the start of the project; 92 per cent want to influence the area more positively, and 79 per cent feel less inclined to undertake anti-social behaviour."

The Sergeant from Leith's community policing team said: "This level of engagement is really important for us as community police officers because not only can we deter people from antisocial behaviour, but we can actually engage on their own level and get to know the young people in their own environment.

"And then when we see them out on the street, we can engage in a friendly, sociable way, without necessarily coming across as just another uniform that they have to deal with."

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter