

**POSITIVE FUTURES**

**A REVIEW OF IMPACT  
AND GOOD PRACTICE**

**SUMMARY REPORT**



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## Positive Futures

Positive Futures is a partnership between Sport England, the Football Foundation, the Home Office Drugs Unit and the Youth Justice Board. The aim of the initiative is to use sport to reduce anti-social behaviour, crime and drug use among 10-16 year olds within local neighbourhoods.

## Acknowledgements

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The review was commissioned by Sport England Research and managed by Nick Rowe and Mark van Vastenhoven.

We are grateful to all those who have helped us in this research – the constructive attitude and obvious commitment to the programme of many of the interviewees has contributed greatly to the value of this report.

## Introduction

In September 2001 Leisure Futures was commissioned by Sport England to carry out a “Review of impact and good practice” on a range of revenue funded schemes included in two of its main ‘branded’ programmes - Active Communities and Positive Futures.

The aim of the research was to:

- Carry out a ‘short and sharp’ review of the sporting and broader social impacts of the Active Communities and Positive Futures projects that will provide evidence of what has been achieved to date, identify good practice, and inform and help to shape future investment decisions in these and related programmes.

The more specific objectives of the research were:

- To provide a report of achievement for each project against its stated objectives relating these as far as possible to Sport England’s evaluation framework and key indicators;
- Based on the evidence available, identify good practice and make practical recommendations on how this can be extended more widely to both existing and future projects;
- To provide a summary report that identifies achievements across the programmes generally using a thematic issues based approach; and
- To learn lessons and make recommendations that will help to shape Sport England’s longer-term approaches to evaluation and impact assessment.

This report covers the evaluation of the Positive Futures programme and is a summary report. More detailed findings are available in the individual project reports, which are the subject of a separate document, copies of which are available from Sport England.

## Methodology

All 24 existing Positive Futures schemes in England were covered as part of this research. Half of the schemes were visited and interviews were conducted 'face-to-face'. The remaining twelve schemes were covered via telephone interviews.

The main research tool was a semi-structured interview. This format was used for both the face-to-face and the telephone interviews – which included the project leaders of each scheme. As part of these interviews, we asked interviewees to give their assessment of the success of their project to date on the three national aims of the programme and to rate these on a five point scale: 5 being very successful, 4 successful, 3 neither successful nor unsuccessful or don't know / insufficient evidence, 2 being unsuccessful, and 1 being very unsuccessful.

For some of the other interviews, this format was not practical (either there was insufficient time or the location did not lend itself to a more formal interview) and therefore an amended or more informal version of the questionnaire was used. Success ratings were not asked where it was inappropriate to ask for them, eg because the project had only just started and/or the interviewee had insufficient knowledge.

With all schemes we aimed to interview the lead officer for the scheme and up to three other individuals involved with the programme, including from other partner organisations, thereby gaining a range of different perspectives on the operation and delivery of Positive Futures.

For those schemes where we conducted a site visit, there was the additional benefit of being able to see the physical characteristics of the area covered by the scheme, the opportunity to talk to the deliverers in more depth and sometimes an opportunity to see the programme in action and have brief conversations with some of the young people taking part.

The table on the next page lists the schemes and indicates whether they were subject to site visit or telephone interview.

**Table 1: Positive Futures schemes included in this study**

<b>Scheme location/name</b>	<b>Site visit or telephone interview</b>
Barking and Dagenham	Site
Birmingham	Telephone
Blackburn	Site
Bolton	Telephone
Bristol - Southmead	Site
Derby - Sport 2000	Telephone
Gateshead	Telephone
Hackney	Site
Hastings	Telephone
Hull - Sport And Not Drugs	Site
N E Lincs	Telephone
Nottingham	Telephone
Norwich	Telephone
Oxford	Site
Plymouth	Telephone
Portsmouth	Site
Salford	Site
Sandwell	Telephone
Sheffield	Telephone
Southampton	Site
Southwark	Site
Teesside - Reach for Success	Site
Walsall	Site
Wolverhampton	Telephone

In addition to the core interview programme we received a number of background documents and papers - some supplied by Sport England at the outset of the research but most collected from the Positive Futures schemes, either on the site visit or received in the post. This included a small number of third party research studies on individual schemes. We have read and analysed these additional documents and included some of the findings in this report where appropriate.

Although this is primarily a qualitative study, there is an understandable demand from the national partners involved with Positive Futures for quantitative statistics providing evidence of

the impact of the programme against its overall objectives of reducing crime, reducing drug misuse and increasing participation in sport amongst the 10-16 year olds taking part. We discuss elsewhere in this report the difficulties in finding and interpreting this kind of evidence. We have, however, summarised this evidence where it is available. We also set out two other types of evidence: (a) the views of those involved in the projects whether as deliverers, project-leaders or partners, based on their direct experience on the ground; and (b) case profiles of individual young people who have been changed by their experience of the Positive Futures programme.

In our view, the evidence from any single source (quantitative statistics, stakeholders' views, case profiles) is insufficient to prove the case for the programme achieving its intended outcomes. But, taking all three types of evidence together, the case is much more compelling for two of the programme's three main aims (reduction in youth offending and increase in sports participation).

## Overview of delivery

### **The Positive Futures model**

#### Organisational framework

The following extract from pre-published material on the programme sets out the model for the programme (taken from, 'Positive Futures - an overview of activity and progress, April 2000 - March 2001).

The organisational framework for the programme is set out below.

There is growing recognition that sport and recreation play an important part in tackling a range of social problems. Positive Futures takes in the gap between primary and secondary school when the evidence suggests that boys can be lost from education and girls from sport with an increasing risk of their drift into the "hanging around" and "drug misuse" cultures. Sport can present an opportunity to engage young people in a positive alternative not just in terms of participation in activities, but across a range of social exclusion issues including education, employment and training, community leadership and healthy lifestyles.

"Accordingly Positive Futures is more than just the provision of sport and incorporates:

- outreach work to make contact with young people at street level;
- a sporting programme or programmes that involves participation, coaching and competition;
- training and mentoring using sport as the focus;
- education programmes, linked to sport, as a pathway to healthier living and improved social skills; and
- leadership training based around sport that encourages helping others and long-term involvement in leisure activities.

#### Intended outcomes

The intended outcomes (from the same document) are set out below:

- a reduction in youth offending in the locality of a project;
- a reduction in drug use among 10 - 16 year olds participating on the schemes;
- an increase in regular participation in sport and physical activity by 10 - 16 year olds.

### **Positive Futures 'on the ground'**

#### The similarities to the model

Most of the 24 projects 'on the ground' shared some of the characteristics set out in the organisational framework, most notably:

- *a sporting programme* involving participation, coaching and competition;
- *linked education programmes* setting out pathways to healthier living and improved social skills;
- *the young people targeted*, are from around the age of 10 to 16, and are either those most at risk or those who do not have access to mainstream leisure provision and are in danger of disengaging from society.

Many projects were developing training and leadership training in particular. Some were using mentors (eg Blackburn) and others attracting volunteers from the local community (eg Walsall). However, the projects are at an early stage in their lifecycle - it takes 12 months to establish links, partnerships, organise sessions and, crucially, gain the trust of participants. Plus, there are - for obvious reasons - difficulties in attracting volunteers from the communities in which the projects are based, while many sporting qualification courses take a year from initial interest and enrolment to qualification.

All of the 24 projects also shared the national aims of:

- reducing youth offending amongst participants;
- *reducing drug use* amongst participants and;
- increasing regular participation in sport amongst participants.

However, it should be noted that some projects also included other local aims, such as those relating to educational outcomes.

### The variations on the model

In our review we also found, however, important variations from the Positive Futures 'standard' model (many of these variations are explained by the different origins of the projects ie those that emerged from the Youth Justice Board and those that were originally Sport England's Active Communities projects). The variations included:

- *outreach* - while outreach work is integral to many projects, some projects recruit all or most of their participants from referrals from a variety of agencies – often the Youth Offending Team (YOT) but also sometimes education services or other agencies working in this area, while others accept young people who turn up of their own volition. For many projects, attendance by the young people is voluntary, but for at least one (Norwich) it is compulsory;
- *targeting* - some projects are precisely targeted at the 50 young people most at risk (this is a specific objective of the Youth Justice Board's youth inclusion projects), others more widely at the next, larger cohort of young people defined by one police officer we interviewed as 'borderline', i.e. those at risk of becoming disengaged from society but have not yet done so.
- *diversionary or developmental* - This difference in targeting is also partly reflected in the

differing views of the projects and of different partners. For some projects, the underlying philosophy is to provide diversionary activities to give young people less opportunity to offend. For others, the philosophy is to help guide the self-development of young people so that they have less desire to offend. Typically, those with the former philosophy may engage greater numbers of young people than those projects with the latter philosophy - who will have more intense, often 'one to one' interventions with the young people targeted

- *geographical spread* - some projects are located within a single estate with a population of 1,000 to 2,000, others had a much larger geographic remit covering a population of 20,000 or more.
- *management and delivery methods* - all 24 projects had different structures and delivery methods, with lead agencies ranging from local authority youth services to national charities (often working in the community development or youth work sectors), to a company emerging from an initiative started by a professional basketball club, to a charitable trust established by a local police / business partnership. The traditional local authority leisure / sports development delivery mechanism is very much a minority model. There was also a wide range of partners involved in the different projects

This wide variety is sometimes masked because they are all considered under the generic banner of 'Positive Futures'.

Despite, or, perhaps, because of this variety, all the schemes have been successful in attracting, and retaining, young people from either or both the cohorts ('most at risk' and 'borderline'.) All schemes have been successful at reaching young people whom mainstream leisure provision has been unable to reach.

### Sporting programmes

All projects offer sporting programmes involving participation, coaching and competition. Football is the dominant sport and one of the main 'vehicles' for Positive Futures but many other sports play a part. One project for instance focuses entirely on basketball (Teesside) and many others deliberately take a multi-sport approach and involve the young people in choosing activities. Some of the more adventurous and/or risky activities, especially if they have involved travel and a residential element have been reported as having an extremely positive effect on the confidence, morale and behaviour of the young people taking part. These activities have also had the added benefit of offering more opportunities to talk to the young people and to break down barriers, simply because of the longer time spent on them.

Some of the activities offered on the programme which were 'less expected' are set out below:

Canoeing  
Climbing  
Deep sea fishing  
Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme  
Golf  
Highboard diving  
Horseriding  
Motorsports  
Paintball  
Residential weekends based on outdoor activities  
Sailing  
Skiing & snowboarding  
Surfing  
Trampolining

### Working on the projects

But what is it actually like to work on a Positive Futures project? What is the reality? A scheme might be based in a small shop in the neighbourhood's local shopping centre or in a youth centre on the estate that is being specifically targeted. The sessions, themselves, are based in a variety of facilities - often kick-about areas or open spaces near or on the targeted area, sometimes Astroturfs or local sports centres, occasionally much 'glitzier' facilities such as those at West Bromwich Albion or at the University of East Anglia. The activity hours are programmed to suit the needs of the young people, which means in practice evenings and at weekends.

The nature of the work is mainly defined by the customer group itself - a difficult group, disengaged, sometimes excluded or truanting from school, often de-motivated, often at odds with the 'adult world', a group which lacks the disciplines of time-keeping, self-organisation and self-regulation. The scale of the task facing the projects should not be underestimated.

Probably the most striking finding of our review has been the dedication, commitment and blend of skills from coaching and sports development to youth work and counselling which have been shown by the staff delivering and leading the projects. As one experienced manager said, "This isn't a mainstream sports development post. Coaches on Positive Futures are detached youth workers with a football under their arms." Or as another manager, with 10 years experience of football in the community put it, "It's been a real eye-opener. These are the type of young people that, if you let it slip for a minute, you've lost everything you started." Or, as a senior council officer and partner, observed, "I don't know how people can work at that intensity. The level of energy required is enormous. Young people need that level of energy. And the fact that [the Positive Futures Co-ordinator] is local - that helps as well."

### **Main findings - delivery**

**The success of the projects is mainly determined by the quality and commitment of the staff involved.**

We were extremely impressed by the quality of staff delivering the projects, and consider that one of the key lessons in terms of good practice is that the projects depend on the quality of their staff. The following quote from the co-ordinator of one project sums up both the experience generally from the projects and our view as independent observers:

"There is no blueprint for a successful project. It depends on the deliverers. The key to all projects is the right staff – who are not necessarily the most qualified, but those with rapport and commitment. The thing that comes first is the kids – not your careers, not aiming for statistics, not about getting kudos, not about being a stepping stone to get yourself somewhere else. And organisations shouldn't be doing this work just because there is funding. They should do it because they want to do it."

(Positive Futures Co-ordinator)

**It is the unanimous view of stakeholders that Positive Futures is an extremely valuable programme.**

This praise for, and commitment to the scheme, came from a wide range of sources, including representatives from youth services, social services, leisure services, police, independent trusts, professional sports clubs. However, there was an acceptance that Positive Futures rarely works in isolation and it is often difficult to differentiate the benefits emerging from this compared to other regeneration/ social inclusion projects working in the same area.

"I think it's been singularly successful. Superb. Wonderful. I think the staff are wonderful and bring a non-social work approach [which is good]. Second, it's not focusing entirely on the 50 most at risk, it takes in a broader group and therefore it doesn't label people. Third, it has helped the Youth Inclusion Programme to establish an identity and it has given it a vehicle. Fourth, the people on the local estate now have a sense of relief that someone is engaging with the kids. Fifth, it is engaging with some of the most difficult to engage. Sixth, it has been disciplined. It hasn't been soft."

[Senior social services council officer; chair of steering group]

"I was an electrician but I had an industrial injury and was sacked. But my wife works as a youth worker, and I started to help out. I got training and became a volunteer. I find that I have got skills, I have the mindset where I can relate to the kids and I can get the message across. I see a lot of good in these kids but I also see them as having lots of barriers put in front of them. If you tell people they're stupid too much then they start to believe it and they haven't got a chance of competing in the job market. This scheme is trying to buck that trend. It's the single and most positive initiative in three years that I have been involved in this kind of work. The kids get feelings of ownership and feelings of achievement. You can tell – beams on faces, attitude, and body language – you can tell they have gained whether its participation or improved fitness. It's a very positive experience." (Deliverer, Blackburn)

**All of the projects feel that they have successfully 'engaged' with young people 'at risk'.**

The objectives of Positive Futures are dependent on the individual projects reaching out to young people who either have undertaken or are at risk of criminal behaviour and/or drug misuse. Whilst the projects vary in the percentage of young people taking part who fall into this category, all of the project managers interviewed were clear that the scheme is successful in

this respect and in many cases much more so than any other initiatives that have been attempted in the area.

**There is a very strong demand for ‘more’.**

Whilst many of the schemes had barely been running for a year, the positive and early impacts that they are having on the areas selected for implementation, is already leading to increasing demands. This is operating on three levels:

- (1) within the scheme itself, where the ‘referral agencies’ are requesting more places (often with the need for the establishment of a waiting list);
- (2) in the local authority arena where there have been discussions about funding more posts and/or extending the scheme to other parts of the Borough/ City; and
- (3) amongst the young people themselves who, in a number of cases, are asking for more activities (both sporting and education) and/or for activities to continue indefinitely.

**Most stakeholders were realistic about both the benefits and the limitations of the programme**

Most stakeholders were at pains to point out the difficulties of working with the sort of young people who are targeted by the programme. It is clear that many of them are at best, ‘challenging, difficult and unresponsive’ but can also be ‘intimidating, abusive and violent’. Not surprisingly it was reported to take time to ‘engage’ with these people but the view was that the majority of regular participants showed positive signs of change in behaviour and that there were clear short-term benefits.

However, most interviewees were cautious about whether this would lead to longer-term changes. The feeling was that the problems they were having to deal with were deep seated and that Positive Futures could only impact on the lives of these young people for, at best, a few hours per week. Peer groups and the home environment would still have a greater influence.

## Findings - youth offending

### Quantitative evidence

A number of the projects quoted or provided quantitative statistics about decreases in youth offending. This quantitative evidence can be summarised as follows:

#### **Barking and Dagenham**

Police statistics scrutinised by this review show that the number of offences in the Gascoigne Ward (the Positive Futures area) decreased by 77% in June to August 2001 compared to the same quarter in 2000 immediately prior to the Positive Futures programme.

#### **Blackburn**

It was reported that crime had decreased by 14% over the summer in Mill Hill (the Positive Futures area) and that the picture for the year was a 17.5% decrease.

#### **Bristol**

There has been a 40% reduction in crime levels on the Southmead Estate since the first Sports Development Worker was appointed. In the last full year of the scheme's operation there has been a drop in recorded crime incidents of 265.

#### **Hackney**

Police statistics scrutinised by the review show that reported crime in the New River neighbourhood (which includes the Woodberry Down Estate - the Positive Futures area) decreased by 15% between September 2000 and February 2001 (when the Positive Futures programme was live) compared to no overall decrease in the period for Hackney as a whole.

#### **Hull**

Youth crime across the city has fallen by 56% from 2000 to 2001 (the period that the Positive Futures scheme has been running). None of the regular participants on the scheme have offended since becoming involved in the project.

#### **Portsmouth**

Having seen the remarkably positive benefits on the estates where the project has been running for the last year, the city council's housing department has unilaterally decided to fund two more sports worker posts in other 'troubled areas' of the city.

#### **Plymouth**

Figures quoted in 'Plymouth Youth Inclusion Project (YIP), Barne Barton - interim evaluation report' (NB: Draft report only) state that there was a 75% reduction in both arrest and offence units among the top 50, from before to after engaging with the YIP. The Positive Futures programme is closely related and complementary to the YIP programme.

#### **Salford**

Police statistics scrutinised by the review show that the number of offences in the Langworthy & Seedley area (the Positive Futures area) had decreased by 18% in

August to October 2000 compared with the same quarter in the previous year before the Positive Futures programme. The decrease in crime has continued and stood at 27% in February to April 2001 compared to the same quarter in the previous year, pre-Positive Futures.

Salford has also undertaken a review of sample case studies of offenders. Of a sample of 48 participants, eight had an offending history. Three of these have not offended since starting the programme; and three have committed only isolated, minor offences. Analysis of the two remaining persistent offenders shows multiple 'at risk' factors. The sample suggests that Positive Futures has a positive impact on around 75% of offenders, but is less effective for those with more deep-seated problems.

### **Southampton**

The youth crime rate fell during the summer when the project was running.

### **Teesside**

There has been a 57% reduction in juvenile arrests in the target area.

There has been a 62% reduction in crime and disorder incidents in the Grangetown and Southbank areas (the original target areas for the scheme which has since expanded to a wide range of other areas in Teesside).

### **Wolverhampton**

Recorded youth offending in the Positive Futures areas (Lowhills and Bushberry) decreased in Summer 2001 compared to the same period in the previous year by 70% during the 'Splash' six week summer holiday programme (which was partnered by Positive Futures, the police and other partners).

In many of these cases the Positive Futures programme was only one of a number of interventions and initiatives, including notably YIP programmes, aimed at decreasing youth offending. Thus, while Positive Futures can be viewed as playing a part in these overall reductions, these other initiatives are also important.

It should also be recognised that much of this quantitative evidence relates to all offending or all youth offending in the area rather than to the sub-set of offending by young people participating in the Positive Futures (or, for that matter, YIP) programme.

### **Stakeholders' Views on Reduction in Youth Offending**

Stakeholders were asked to give their assessment of the success of their project to date in terms of decreasing offending amongst participants. They were asked to rate the achievement on a five point scale: 5 being very successful, 4 successful, 3 neither successful nor unsuccessful or don't know / insufficient evidence, 2 being unsuccessful, and 1 being very unsuccessful.

On average, the 71 respondents, rated achievement on this aim at 4.1 (i.e. 'successful'), with deliverers rating achievement slightly higher at 4.2 and partners slightly lower at 4.0. It should be noted that Stakeholders rate the achievement of the project on this aim considerably higher than on its second aim (of decreasing drugs misuse) and this adds credibility to their view.

The following comments of stakeholders underlines the realism of those involved in Positive Futures, their recognition of the need to work in partnership, the benefits of other initiatives, and that it is having an impact both on crime and the perception of crime:

"It's difficult to say. The young people are only with us for some of the time. There are lots of other influences. All we can hope is that we do see an improvement and that they are less likely to offend. The real world is to get them back on track and to give them some opportunities." (Realism of professionals and partners working with Positive Futures) [Partner agency]

"The strength of the project is working with the Youth Inclusion Programme." (Positive Futures should be seen as an integral element in an overall package, not as a stand-alone initiative.) [Positive Futures project leader]

"Everybody is saying that it is achieving – decreasing offending among the participants and amongst the community generally – both in terms of actuality and in terms of perception." [As above] (Positive Futures tackling both crime and the perception of crime)

"I help to liaise with the community. There's now a perception in the community that young people are not perceived as a threat." [Police] (Perceptions of crime)

## Case profiles

Many of the projects volunteered case profiles of individual young people who had taken part in the Positive Futures programme, become enthused by it, and had changed their lives because of it. This indicates that, for some individuals, participation in sport via Positive Futures was the catalyst for their developing as individuals and re-engaging with society.

Before the Positive Futures project started, Grahame had been accused of stabbing someone in a nearby pub. When the case came to court, the Positive Futures Co-ordinator was a character witness, stating he had seen a considerable change in Grahame since the project had started. Grahame was found not guilty. Since then – almost a year ago – his behaviour has been exemplary and he is proud of the way he has changed his life around. At the beginning of the project, he was very aggressive on the pitch, but he knew that he had to change this if he wanted to get picked for matches. And he wanted to get picked, so he changed. He now has a girl friend. (Barking)

Jason was very much the hard lad. He was one of the top three on the list of 50. We have a map of the area that shows where incidents occur. We could see which clusters were down to Jason. Initially he was very anti doing anything. But he got interested in the Positive Futures cycle speedway project. His offending dropped right off. He hasn't offended since March 2000. He now wants to get a job; he's seriously into his job hunt. He's left the course now but he rings up to see how things are going. A large proportion of the help wasn't the sport itself; it was the adult contact. It's the staff as much as the activity. (Salford)

But, as the quantitative statistics and the stakeholders' views indicate, not all the interventions

are positive. Sometimes the difficult life-situations of the young people involved, and the multiple at-risk factors, require on-going attention.

At the beginning Susan was very difficult. Her family situation was horrendous and she was fantasising and making up a false history. She didn't go to school, her behaviour was absolutely off the wall and she was starting to offend. She was referred to us when her grandmother, with whom she lived, said she couldn't stay there any more. We found she was keen on football. She attended training sessions; we took her to matches. She had joined a local girls football club. But then she got moved by social services and we lost contact for a bit, though she insisted on staying with the girls football club. She is currently breaching bail for a previous offence – probably to do with drinking. But we were hopeful until last Wednesday when she was stopped for criminal damage. She still hasn't got the personal skills and resources to get on with her life. So we will need to be there with her for some time. She's still at the football. (Salford)

### **Main findings - youth offending**

Positive Futures projects are having an impact in terms of decreasing offending amongst those participating in the programmes. However, this impact should not be over-stated: for some young people it clearly makes a difference, but for others the difference is much less clear-cut or unproven. It is also widely accepted that Positive Futures rarely works in isolation and that it is often difficult to differentiate the benefits emerging from this compared to other regeneration/ social inclusion projects working in the same area.

## Findings - drugs misuse

### **Quantitative evidence**

There is very much less quantitative evidence for whether Positive Futures has achieved any reduction in misuse of drugs by those participating in the programme. Indeed, it is of the nature of drugs use that quantitative evidence is hard to come by - surveys of potential users are notoriously unreliable (Is he saying he is taking drugs because he wants to brag about it? Is he saying he is not taking drugs because he wants to hide his problem?) Some people would argue that drugs and youth crime are so inextricably linked that movement in crime figures reflects drugs use also.

The following section highlights some of the approaches undertaken, and the findings relating to drug misuse, amongst a sample of the projects:

#### **Bristol**

At Bristol, specific themes are identified by the young people themselves and in turn they work together on gathering information and setting up displays at the local youth centre. An independent study undertaken by the University of South West England found evidence of improvements in health as a result of participants' engagement in sport and in particular "a great help for some individuals in their struggle to give up drugs or alcohol".

#### **Salford**

At Salford, a technique used by some professionals in the public health and social services to indicate those in potential danger of drugs misuse, known as Christo's Inventory, has been piloted to participants on some Positive Futures courses. This shows a fall in the average rating from 5.7 before the course to 3.5 at the end of the course. (The Inventory rates on a scale up to 20, with 20 indicating a severe danger of drugs and/or alcohol misuse.)

#### **Southwark**

At Southwark, drugs prevention is delivered through the use of peer mentors who themselves have undergone specific training. This approach ensures local experience and knowledge and an understanding of current pressures on young people.

#### **Teesside**

The Teesside 'Reach For Success' project introduces drugs prevention within the context of sport and lifestyle, incorporating specific sessions on sport and diet; fluids and performance; smoking and performance. All sessions are delivered by coaches from the Teesside Mohawks Basketball Club

#### **Gateshead**

Gateshead works in partnership with the local North East Council for Alcohol and Addiction (NECA) in delivering drugs education in its essentially street based approach. Whilst the approach is informal, the content is defined, promoting discussion on factual information around cause, effect and consequence, incorporating drugs and sexual health.

An independent study conducted by the University of Teesside found evidence that the young people taking part in both the Gateshead and Teesside projects changed their behaviour in a positive manner across a range of variables – this included a positive change in attitudes/behaviour towards ‘smoking and alcohol/ drug use’.

### **Wolverhampton**

A local study that has tracked drugs use in Wolverhampton over a 20-year period has been completed. This shows that drug use by 12 to 18 year olds had been increasing year on year until last year when drug use ‘levelled off’. This coincides with the period that Positive Futures, including the drugs workshops integral to the programme, was running. This indicates that Positive Futures may have had a part to play in halting the increase in drugs use.

## **Stakeholders’ views on drug misuse**

Stakeholders were asked to give their assessment of the success of their project to date in terms of decreasing drugs misuse amongst participants. Perhaps not surprisingly, the views of the stakeholders echo the relative lack of quantitative evidence. They were asked to rate the achievement on a five point scale: 5 being very successful, 4 successful, 3 neither successful nor unsuccessful or don’t know / insufficient evidence, 2 being unsuccessful, and 1 being very unsuccessful.

On average, the 71 respondents, rated achievement on this aim at 3.4 (i.e. ‘neither successful nor unsuccessful’ or ‘don’t know’ - with the majority stating ‘don’t know’). Deliverers rated achievement a little higher at 3.6, and project leaders a little lower at 3.3.

Some staff delivering the programmes based their rating on their observation that, typically, at the start of the programme, a number of the young people wanted to test them out by smoking or using drugs, but that once they had firmly established the discipline that any use of drugs would lead to an immediate ban, this behaviour stopped. Also, as one said, “The problem can be addressed by engaging their interest in sport; they know you can’t play properly if you’re off your face!”

Typically, stakeholders find it “too difficult to call”, though there are one or two who believe that it has had a positive impact:

"Our impression and that of the police is that we have had a successful impact [in terms of drugs misuse]. We have also had a huge decrease in prostitution [amongst girls on the estate]." (Partner)

## **Case profiles**

While there are many case profiles that show the change in individuals in terms of offending or in re-engaging with the education system or in developing their sporting skills and establishing links with clubs, there are less case profiles that specifically focus on drugs misuse. However the following comments provide some evidence of positive changes brought about by individual projects:

“There was one lad who used heroin who got involved with playing football at a competitive level. Now he was told not to come because he was disrupting the team. He wasn’t banned which would happen at any local league club, but with support from us and workers in the project we were able to talk about his behaviour. It was clear that he wanted to play football. So we spent a long time talking about things and he eventually stopped disrupting the team because we helped him focus on playing football. Thus, his behaviour changed for his own sake, no one else’s.” (Project worker – Bristol)

“It really helped when I was coming off. It occupied you and made you feel better. Some days, when I first started to get off it, I would just wander around the weights. I would go there after counselling and now I want to train up and give something back because all I’ve done until now is take things all the time.” (Former young heroin addict)

### **Main findings - drug misuse**

Whilst there is very little evidence to show that participation in Positive Futures programmes has a positive impact in terms of decreasing drugs misuse amongst those participating in the programme, this does not mean that the programme is not actually having a positive impact. Most projects are deploying a range of approaches in delivering drug prevention work. However, in terms of measuring impact in this area, there is still some work to do to establish what this evidence would look like and then develop techniques to collect it.

## Findings - sports participation

### Quantitative evidence

A number of the projects undertook a 'neighbourhood audit' at the outset of the project, many of which summarised sporting provision in the area. The audits also provided baseline data on crime rates for the target population, patterns/trends in drug use, exclusion/truancy rates in local schools and referred to other local social problems. However, there appears to be no quantitative evidence to show what use was made of this sporting provision either by the Positive Futures participants themselves or, more generally, by the 10 to 16 year old age group from the Positive Futures area.

Nevertheless, many Positive Futures projects are located in areas where there are few sports facilities. A number of the projects also noted the difficulties of organising participants to travel to facilities further a field. The consensus was that participants on their own would not have the skills, motivations or knowledge to travel to facilities outside their neighbourhood. Finally, there were reports from some projects reflecting on an attitude in some mainstream sports facilities which would make it difficult for young people like those participating in the Positive Futures programme to access those facilities - the lights to the astroturf that no-one knows who is responsible for turning on, the leisure centres that become 'double booked' when they realise who they are dealing with, the keys to community facilities that are lost.

It is fair to say that many of the young people do not know how to access, and don't seek out, mainstream leisure provision, while the facilities themselves do not consider the young people to be part of their customer base.

Despite this difficulty of establishing baseline participation, it is clear that the projects have been successful in attracting and retaining participants both to the sporting programmes and to the complementary education, healthy living and drugs workshops.

The Positive Futures National Co-ordinator has recently undertaken a national data collection exercise which identifies the number of young people participating, the number of sports hours run, the number and percentage of participants completing the sports programme and the number joining external sports clubs or graduating to an external programme.

We have not undertaken a detailed statistical analysis of the data collected as part of this report. However, the data from the projects shows the huge amount of sporting activity that has been organised by the Positive Futures projects in areas where there were previously very few sporting opportunities.

The following quantitative information can be calculated by aggregating the figures to include those projects for which figures were not available:

Total number participating in all the projects  
during April to September (approx)  
**4,136**

Total number of sporting hours programmed (approx)  
**10,076**

Average attendance at all sporting programme hours (approx) **78%**

While the overall numbers participating in the projects, at 4,136, is impressive, the single most important quantitative finding is that for average attendance - at 78% averaged across more than 20 projects, this shows how popular the sports programmes are. It also gives a strong indication of the commitment of the participants to the programme. Given the situation and personal histories of many of the participants, this is a remarkable achievement for the projects.

### **Stakeholders' views on sports participation**

Stakeholders were asked to give their assessment of the success of their project to date in terms of increasing regular participation in sports and physical activity amongst participants. They were asked to rate the achievement on a five point scale: 5 being very successful, 4 successful, 3 neither successful nor unsuccessful or don't know / insufficient evidence, 2 being unsuccessful, and 1 being very unsuccessful.

On average, the 71 respondents, rated achievement on this aim at 4.6 (i.e. midway between 'successful' and 'very successful') with deliverers rating this higher at 4.9 and partners rating it lower - but still better than 'successful' - at 4.3. This is the highest of the Stakeholders Ratings by some margin and is evidence on their view that the projects are delivering in terms of sporting impact.

### **Case profiles**

Again, there are a large number of case profiles from across the country of individuals who have seized on the sporting opportunities provided to develop their sporting skills, move on to local sports clubs, take coaching and leadership training qualifications such as the Community Sports Leaders Award as well as governing body of sports awards, and even to begin developing a career in the sports sector. Only a few are given below:

"Five of the 18 young people who started in April this year have graduated to 'self-directed' activity. For instance, one has gone to Salford Girls Football Club, one to the Eccles Amateur Rugby League, one to roller hockey."

In one project, a number of the young people originally on the 'at risk register' are no longer on it. Two of these have been invited to play for a semi-professional team: "They have found that there is life after the estate. There are interests out there that they want to pursue. They are now playing semi-pro football in front of 2,000 people and picking up £25 a match. They wanted to be treated with respect and the project had done that and it has opened up their horizons."

"I was talking to a teacher about another lad we have on the programme. The teacher was saying that his whole attitude to school has changed. And he's now doing gymnastics! As for

the group as a whole, in the first two months, we were scared of leaving them with only one or two staff. Now they are running their own tournament. If that's not a sign in change in attitude – they've organised it themselves, they've agreed who has to come off during matches, and so on - I don't know what is."

When Terry first started he was excluded from school and banned from every single youth club. He was from a single parent family; his brother had a history of prison. Positive Futures was the only programme there was and initially he was involved only in the kick-about sessions. Then, through the PF programme, he became involved in a football team, first playing, then as captain. This brought him a lot closer to the whole project. He began attending a broader range of programmes. He helped in setting up an exchange with Norway and the Caribbean. At 16, he did a Community Sports Leader Award, got the FA Junior Team Manager's Certificate and is currently doing FA Coaching certificate and attending the local college where he is studying for a B Tech in sport and leisure. After having done voluntary work for the last year, he is now doing paid sessional work with the programme – coaching football to under 12s soccer school. He is now looking at university courses. (Southwark)

### **Main findings - sports participation**

There is strong evidence to show that Positive Futures is having a real impact in terms of increasing regular participation in sports amongst participants to the programme and that a number of these are developing their sports skills - joining sports clubs, gaining coaching and leadership qualifications and even seeking employment in the sports sector.

In addition, an average attendance of 78% across all projects shows how popular the sports programmes are with the young people and give a strong indication of the commitment of the participants to the programmes. Given the situation and personal histories of many of the participants, this is a remarkable achievement for the projects.

## Conclusion

In the last six months, Positive Futures has already delivered real benefits to over 4,000 young people living in deprived housing areas, many of them officially recognised as 'at risk' and referred to the programme by other agencies.

We have found much good practice and evidence - both quantitative and qualitative, of positive impact on individuals and local neighbourhoods. With other complementary initiatives, most notably Youth Inclusion Programmes, there have been positive impacts in terms of decreases in youth offending and in terms of increasing participation in sport. There are many case profiles demonstrating how sport has been the catalyst in re-engaging individuals in society by providing motivation and self-belief.

The success of any project of this nature stands or falls almost entirely on the skills and enthusiasm of the Project Leader and the core staff who deliver the programmes. Longer term funding is needed to attract and retain the right calibre of people and to give them sufficient time to establish trust with the young people who are likely to benefit most from the scheme.

A longer-term commitment is also needed if quantitative monitoring is to be effective. The quantitative evidence base demonstrating impact on crime is patchy while that for drugs misuse is thin. This should be recognised as inevitable given the short time the projects have been running, the difficulties with availability, and interpretation, of appropriate statistics from the police and health authorities and the limited resources that project leaders have had to work with.

Given the number of other influences and interventions at play in any area, it should also be recognised that it would be both unrealistic and inappropriate to try and isolate the Positive Futures project as the 'cause' of a social change relating to the Positive Futures project objectives.

In comparison, the qualitative evidence base is strong. The views expressed in our structured interviews with project leaders, deliverers, partners, the evidence of the case studies (and from our conversations with some of the young people themselves), when taken together, make a resounding case for the value of the project.