

Football Not Fireworks event teaches Sheffield youngsters about the dangers of fireworks



Young people gather round to listen to the message behind the event at Parkwood E-ACT Academy, Shirecliffe

As Bonfire Night approaches, the Football Not Fireworks event is steering young people away from antisocial behaviour and bringing them together to play football instead.

Run by the Sheffield Wednesday FC Community Programme, it aims to educate young people about the dangers of fireworks around bonfire night, but also around anti-social behaviour in general.

It is taking place at Parkwood E-ACT Academy in Shirecliffe and at Concord Sports Centre in Shiregreen.

Paul Hebda, 33, the Inclusion Officer at the Sheffield FC Wednesday Community Programme oversees the Premier League Kicks programme, which aims to use the power of the club badge to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Mr Hebda said: "It's your typical youth work. Getting them onside, building that relationship, through football and sport, and working on any issues and barriers that young people or the local community might be facing."

He has been a youth worker for 14 years, so he understands the importance of these events.

He said: "On evenings where there might not be a lot happening, a lot of young people are just hanging around.

"Nine out of ten times, they're not getting involved in anything negative, but that's where it can lead to antisocial or nuisance behaviour."

Mr Hebda has used his experience in youth work to identify ways in which these events could help.

He said: "Around 7 or so years ago, a lot of the provisions started falling, falling, falling, and the youth crime rates started rising, rising, rising. It was no coincidence.

"By having these sorts of activities happening, it helps them stay out of getting involved in that sort of lifestyle."

The event also aims to build relationships with local police officers.

Sergeant Scott Sarson is part of the neighbourhood policing team for North West Sheffield where these events are targeted.

Sgt Sarson said: "It's so useful in getting the kids from what can be a dangerous evening with fireworks flying all over the place, and bringing them into this safe environment.

"Over the last 10 years, youth clubs have gone, and there's not a massive amount of youth engagement events in the evenings."

When asked about the importance of these events for young people, he added: "Events on nights like this are priceless really."

There is more information about the work the Sheffield Wednesday Community Programme does with young people [here](#).

Word Count - 389

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/27i7DBwwWSk>