


Project which aims to get kids hooked on fishing is set to go national

 It was an idea which was born on a peaceful riverbank and became a hugely successful police-led way of diverting young people away from lives of crime.

The scheme, called Get Hooked On Fishing, offers young people, who are regarded as potentially at risk of drifting into crime, the chance to pursue fishing as a pastime to counter their boredom.

Now, those behind the project are developing the next stage as they explore ways of turning it into a national programme.

PC Mick Watson, from Durham Constabulary, had a real passion for fishing which served as the catalyst for the scheme. The officer had been working within the community safety unit at the force's headquarters in 2000 when he was tasked with developing a scheme which would help keep children away from crime.

PC Watson said: 'I was asked to come up with something innovative. I had always been interested in fishing and, working with a young lad I fished with, we came up with the idea together.'

The idea was to provide young people with the chance to fish, which gave them something to do, while at the same time providing a neutral setting for them to discuss their responsibilities to society with volunteers, including police officers.

The scheme became so successful that forces and youth agencies from throughout the country started contacting PC Watson to see how they could implement the idea.

PC Watson points out that 95 per cent of those taking part still fish, including those who never did so before the scheme, and that none of the 600-plus taking part have committed crimes since signing up.



Giving it extra impetus was the support of then sports minister Kate Hoey, who suggested the idea be developed nationally.

In February 2003, PC Watson was granted a three-year career break to develop a charitable organisation in the name of Get Hooked on Fishing, with support from the Durham Agency Against Crime, which was established by Durham Constabulary.

PC Watson said: 'The force is prepared to share good practice so we have helped other forces which are interested in adopting the Get Hooked on Fishing idea.'

'Taking the career break was a risky step for me and I will always be very grateful to Durham Police for letting me take it because I know that at the end of it, I can go back to being a police officer if needs be.'

As a result of his dedication to the project, 12 schemes have been set up across Britain over the past three years, not all called Get Hooked on Fishing, but all inspired and supported by the scheme.

All have involvement from police officers and schemes operate in areas including Birmingham, Staffordshire, Nottingham, Lincolnshire as well as in Scotland.

Thousands of children have taken part, including some with convictions, but PC Watson is keen to point out that it is not a reward for bad behaviour.



PC Mick Watson out fishing with youngsters

He said: 'One of the reasons this scheme works is that the young people realise the consequences of their actions; good behaviour will be rewarded but there are consequences for bad behaviour.'

'Some of the young people involved in the scheme have gone beyond the final reprimand and gone to court but all police officers know young people who have made that mistake, perhaps because they mixed with the wrong people, and who went on to commit crime because there was no intervention at the right time. Our scheme is intervention at the right time. And it helps that a riverbank is neutral ground for the youngsters. Fishing is simply the tool that we use to reach these young people.'

Working with numerous agencies involved in youth issues, he believes the figures for the Durham scheme alone speak for themselves.

Now, the scheme is seeking to build on its success and chief executive Anne Moyle is working

with PC Watson on ways of funding it as a truly national scheme.

She said: 'What Mick has delivered is brilliant and now it has to move onto another level. We need to put a structure in place to take it national, making sure we retain the passion which drives the project. Our vision is to see it replicated all around the UK.'

PC Watson, whose work on the scheme was acknowledged with a Queen's Police Medal in the 2003 New Year's Honours List, said: 'We want to see it develop. We receive three or four inquiries a week asking for help setting up a scheme. This scheme has achieved so much; we have children who were excluded from school who have now gone onto college. And ourselves and other agencies believe that Durham alone has dealt with 30 children who would have ended up in prison were it not for the intervention of Get Hooked on Fishing. That has saved the county three million pounds on the cost of keeping them in prison.'

