

Innovative scheme gives kids the right biking spark

Islington-based youth project has shown positive results in reducing crime

The Sparkplug Motorcycle Project started as a youth engagement scheme, set up nearly 14 years ago by the local authority with support from the police to try and reduce the levels of bike-related crime in the Bingfield Park and surrounding area.

Sparkplug originally operated out of what used to be the park keeper's toilets, with sea containers for storage. Additional funding enabled the project to create and develop a purpose-built building on the corner of Bingfield Park (on the same site as the toilets), completed in August 2010.

This exciting and innovative scheme offers alternative education, training and projects for young people in Islington and the surrounding boroughs through motorcycling. It addresses the social and educational needs of children and young people that may have been excluded from mainstream education as a result of emotional behaviour disorders, learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In



Sparkplug gets youths on the right track

more recent years it has also used the medium of pedal bikes to engage young people.

It has been a success, too, as in recent years local beat/community officers have stated there has been a reduction in bike-related crimes in the area.

Developing its services further and offering a more holistic approach, the

project now includes partnerships with statutory and voluntary service providers. By tailoring its services, it focuses on engagement and using a preventative approach to address the wide-ranging and complex needs that the young people it works with presents.

Sparkplug provides accredited courses to local educational authori-

ties, schools, PRUs, other alternative education providers and social services for Years 9–11 in motorcycle mechanics (OCN Level 1 & 2). But acknowledging that accreditations are not always enough to turn a young person's life around, Sparkplug's work includes mentoring and one-to-one support.

It also offers a variety of tailor-made accredited short courses (AQA Unit Award Scheme) in motorcycle mechanics, handling and controls, pedal bike repair and maintenance. These courses enhance personal development and employability skills and can be delivered on and off site as required.

Sparkplug also runs a NEET project for 16–24 year olds with AQA Accreditations in motorcycle mechanics and personal development skills.

A Dr Bike Project (subject to funding, and allocation of bikes from the police) allows younger users to learn how to strip a pedal bike down, rebuild it, paint it in their own colour and design – and eventually keep the bike!

