

The route to tackling anti-social behaviour

Computer game-playing interspersed with chlamydia testing... bus-based snooker and state-of-the-art music production... all in the back of a white van? The council's approach to anti-social behaviour is certainly unconventional, but does it work? Star reporter Rachael Cleary went to find out.

IT'S a wet, drab, cold night in Shiregreen and a dozen hooded teenagers are clustered around a white van.

But it's not just any white van.

The lads - all aged between 13 and 17 - are playing on a Nintendo Wii, its enormous plasma screen mounted on to the side of the vehicle. And that's just the outside.

Inside the van is a chlamydia testing cubicle. Under the supervision of a fully-qualified health worker, worried teenagers can check up on their sexual health by giving a small urine sample. And then they can pick up where they left off on Fifa football.

Ashleigh Roddick, aged 21, from Barnsley, is a health worker on the van. He admitted: "It's hit and miss as to how many people take the test. Five people have done the test this evening and we give free condoms out as well. We always joke that it's a Wii for a wee."

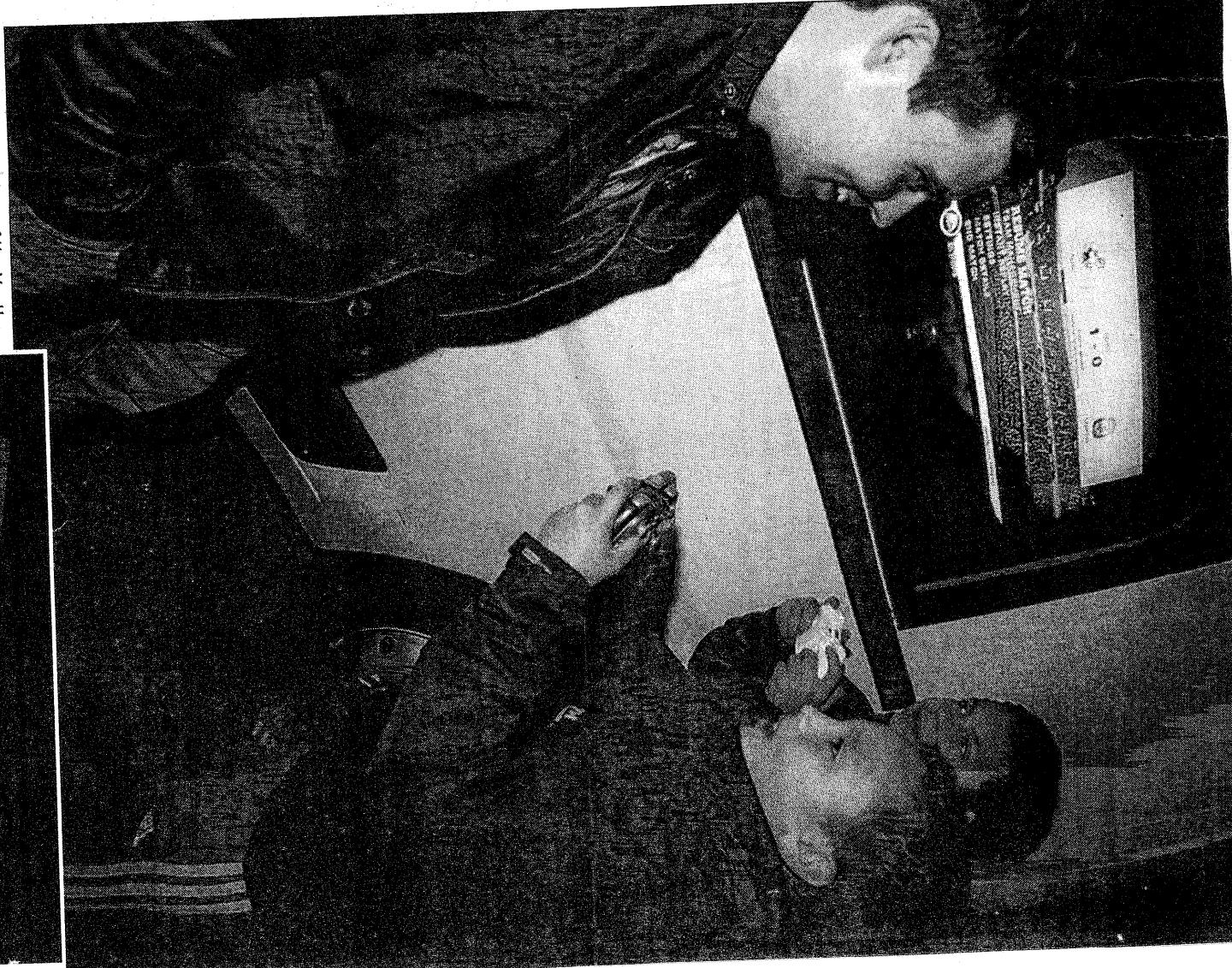
Nicole Harwood, 31, from Ecclesall Road, who manages Sheffield Council's youth support service, said: "It's a great way to get people to test for chlamydia - especially lads who wouldn't normally go into a clinic and get themselves checked out."

The council's street-based teams work with South Yorkshire Police, the fire service and youth support service, and use three vans - including one, for budding DJs, equipped with computers, record decks, a state-of-the-art speaker system and several sets of headphones.

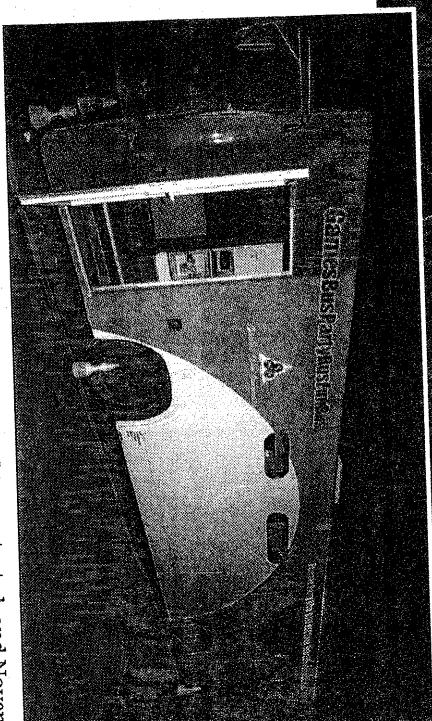
The vans are dispatched twice a week on a rota to estates with high numbers of complaints about anti-social behaviour.

The project aims to reduce the risk of anti-social behaviour by giving teenagers something to do and people to talk to. Winston Johnson, a 46-year-old family advocacy worker, works on the DJ van on Friday nights. "It's a great way for kids to develop an interest in music," he says. "They can come here and mess about with the equipment and realise they are actually making something."

Over in Parson Cross the snooker bus is run by the Stephen Harris Academy for snooker.



Game on: Matt Peters of the Youth Offending Service with Kyron Bingham (12) and Stefan McBride (10) and (inset) the Games Bus.



It's not just Carrie who recognises the seasonal trends of anti-social behaviour. According to Nicolle, October and the run-up to Halloween and Bonfire Night are notoriously bad for wheelie bin fires as well as other types of anti-social behaviour.

"We call it the 'dark nights' period and, traditionally, during that period, there is an increase in anti-social behaviour," she said.

According to statistics, the vans are doing a good job: there was a 26 per cent reduction in incidents of anti-social behaviour between

Getting together with the local community

On cue: Enjoying a game of snooker, from left, Michael Forbes, Martin Perry and David Hales.

TACKLING anti-social behaviour is a priority for most safer neighbourhood policing teams across South Yorkshire.

Members of the teams host regular Police And Community Together meetings, aimed at giving local residents the chance to raise issues of concern which police and other agencies can then set as priorities.

And anti-social behaviour is mentioned at most meetings.

Sean Dawson, 42, from Longley, who works on the 'chiller van', says the aim is simple.

"We're here to help them and give them something to do, as well as providing somewhere safe and warm. And the kids love it," he adds, producing a wad of feedback forms from teenagers.

One girl has written that if she wasn't on the van she'd be getting into trouble, while another says the vans are great for 'feeling safe and knowing people'.

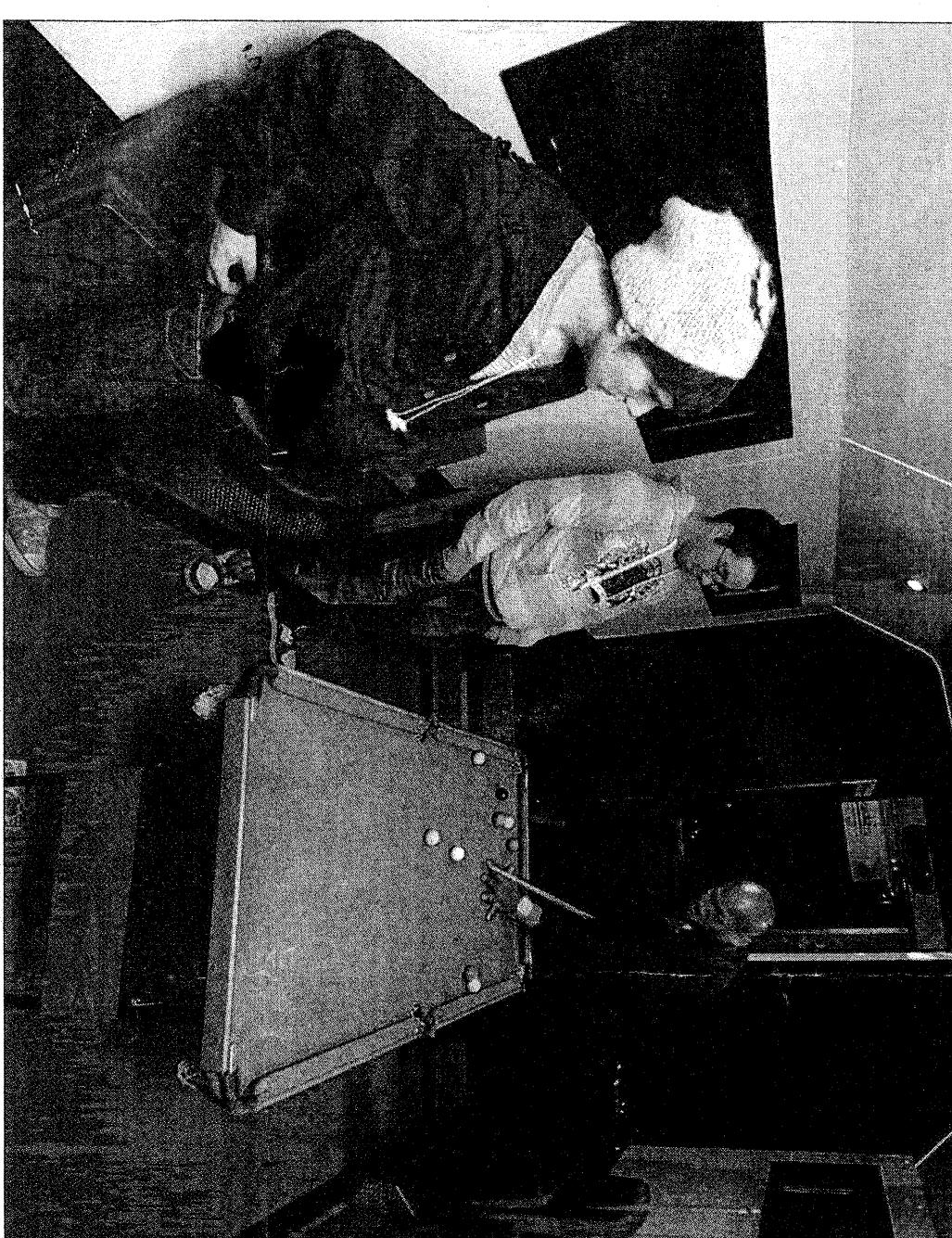
And that's got to be better than

Chi Con Hughes said his force takes reports of anti-social behaviour "very seriously" but stressed the issue cannot be addressed by police alone.

He pointed out many offenders have numerous other issues partner agencies and organisations are better equipped at dealing with and that a team approach works better.

Derbyshire Constabulary takes a pro-active stance in dealing with anti-social behaviour, organising a wide range of diversionary activities for young people aimed at keeping them off the streets.

The force uses the activities, including boxing-based fitness sessions, computer gaming sessions and discos, as a chance to interact with young people and provide positive role models for them to



Advice: On the Integrated Youth Service Van at Parsons Cross, from left, Matt Peters of the Youth Offending Service with staff, Ashleigh Roddam and Rebecca Henthorn.

