Kicking off safer futures for young people

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More than a game: football initiative created safe space for Birmingham youngsters

VPS and Sport 4 Life turn the findings of *Safer Sites, Safer Futures* into positive action

Young people in Birmingham were given the opportunity to get active, make new connections and enjoy sport in a safe and supportive environment, through an initiative backed by property security specialist VPS and youth charity Sport 4 Life UK.

Around 25 young people aged 11-14 took part in a free football session at Hodge Hill College in Birmingham on Tuesday 1 September, in the final days of the summer holidays. The event combined football and skills development with the chance to meet others and spend time in a safe environment supported by trusted adults.

VPS funded the programme of youth activity, delivered by Birmingham-based Sport 4 Life UK, as part of its *Safer Sites, Safer Futures* campaign, which has explored the relationship between young people, vacant and vulnerable properties, antisocial behaviour and the importance of positive intervention.

One young participant said:

“It’s been good fun playing football with my mates. I didn’t win, but it’s been nice getting out, having a laugh and doing something different instead of just being inside playing computer games or chilling, out and about.”

The partnership grew directly from an issue VPS sees through its work protecting vacant and vulnerable properties across the UK: an increase in youth-related breaches at customer sites during school holidays. The data is unambiguous - 64% of all summer youth-related vacant property breach incidents occur after mid-July.

VPS’s research for *Safer Sites, Safer Futures* explored some of the factors behind this, including boredom and a lack of meaningful activities for teenagers, alongside the influence of social media and the growing trend for urban exploration of vacant and potentially dangerous buildings. It highlighted that physical security is an essential part of protecting both properties and people from harm – but also that providing positive opportunities and safe places for young people can be an important part of prevention.

Susie Wells**, Head of Marketing at VPS UK and Ireland, who attended the session, said:**

“It was fantastic to see the teenagers enjoying themselves, and the interaction and relationships with the Sport 4 Life coaches was inspiring. It’s incredible how football and sport can become a powerful way to unite young people – someone once referred to it as the currency of the playground, which has always stuck with me.”

Seetan Varani**, Managing Director of VPS UK, said:**

“Through our work protecting vacant and vulnerable properties, we see youth-related breaches increase during school holidays. *Safer Sites, Safer Futures*
helped us look beyond the incidents themselves and better understand some of the factors that can draw young people towards these sites.

“Keeping vulnerable buildings secure is essential, particularly because they can be extremely dangerous places for young people to enter. But security is only part of the picture. If boredom and a lack of meaningful activities can contribute to the problem, then creating positive opportunities and safe places for young people to spend their time has to be part of the conversation too.

“That’s why supporting Sport 4 Life makes so much sense for us. This isn’t simply sponsorship of a summer holiday football event; it’s an opportunity to turn some of what we’ve learned through *Safer Sites, Safer Futures* into practical, preventative action.”

Tom Clarke-Forrest**, Founder and CEO at Sport 4 Life UK, said:**

“At Sport 4 Life UK we understand the importance of events like this to offer safe spaces for young

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people in their communities. The partnership with VPS for this project shows the impact our work can have beyond the football pitch to address wider community challenges and ultimately support us to change the lives of young people."

Sport 4 Life UK contributed to the Safer Sites, Safer Futures campaign, bringing its experience of working directly with young people to the discussion around early intervention, trusted relationships and positive opportunities. VPS and Sport 4 Life are also exploring opportunities for further youth activity as the partnership develops.

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