

Gardening project helps cut number of young offenders

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dig it: Children working on a garden in Newhall as part of the Grow 2 Grow project. Alan Withington (left) says the children grow in self-esteem

A GARDENING project for teenagers has been credited with helping to cut the number of youngsters committing crime in Derbyshire.

Youth offending figures show that in the past year 1,100 young people were dealt with by the courts in the county, compared to 1,500 children during the year before.

The reduction coincides with the introduction of a gardening scheme designed to give new skills to children and teenagers who teachers believe may be at risk of getting into trouble.

And youngsters taking part in a project in Newhall say they have enjoyed it so much that they have taken up gardening as a hobby.

Stefan, 13, from Midway, is one of 13 children who are taking part in the project in a garden in Bretby Road, creating a habitat for bumble bees.

He said: "I have really enjoyed it. I quite like gardening now and have built my own greenhouse at home.

"I grow things like cucumber, herbs and other salad. If I had not have come here I wouldn't have known how to do something like that. I spend my spare time in the garden now instead of hanging around doing nothing."

Grow 2 Grow was started last year by Derbyshire County Council and currently there are five projects running in the county.

Children who take part gain qualifications and certificates in areas such as health and safety, and carpentry once they have completed work.

Since the project was started, nine separate schemes have taken place and there are a further six – which will involve more than 80 youngsters – set to take place in the coming months.

Alan Withington, who developed the Grow 2 Grow scheme, said: "The project shows the youngsters that they can achieve something and use and develop skills.

"There is no better way to raise self-esteem and confidence.

"A project like this also gives the children the opportunity to put what they are learning in school into practice.

"They can apply a subject such as maths to a real situation.

"Grow 2 Grow has proved very successful.

"The children are assessed at the end and are asked what they feel they have gained. We only really receive positive comments about the project."

Mr Withington said work on Newhall's Grow 2 Grow started in January and is expected to finish this week.

Susanna Konowalik, from the Youth Offending Service, said Grow 2 Grow was aimed at developing the skills of young people aged nine to 15 while engaging them in positive activities.

She said she believed it had helped to cut the number of youngsters committing crime.

She said: "The children gain a variety of skills during the project. A lot of the kids come from difficult family situations and this gives them confidence and a belief that they can achieve."