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# This worthwhile project needs backing, not imitating

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**Simon Fanshawe**

Wed 20 Jun 2007 16.40 BST

Pat Stewart takes for granted that someone has to do what she does and it might as well be her. She set up a project for young people in Gorton, Manchester, called On the Streets (OTS). I made a BBC Radio 4 programme about it last autumn, and it is a terrific project. Yet today it has no regular funding.

Its ears are full of praise from every agency you can lay your hands on. Manchester city council says it is "impressed" by the work undertaken by OTS, and proudly trumpets that it has approved funding for "almost £27,000". Oh, yippee! At the last count there were 3,000 attendances at OTS projects by 369 young people. That's £73 per young person.

"Is it time to throw in the towel now?" says Stewart, who despite it all manages to sound eternally optimistic. And she steadfastly refuses to criticise any of the funders or the council. She is endlessly generous about the agencies that seem to me to be strangling her project.

In 2001, Stewart, who had brought up her two children in Gorton, returned to the area. She found that a large number of kids were out of control and behaving antisocially. The residents were terrified. So she and a colleague

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The special thing about the way OTS works is that it focuses on groups of kids, not just individuals. "Antisocial behaviour is a spectator sport," says Stewart. "I am not just going to deal with one person - I want the whole group." And further than that it tries to work with the whole family. "That way, we leave the young person with nowhere to hide and no one else to blame." Tough language.

Stewart and Burley insist that OTS is a crime and disorder project and that what they are doing is facing these young people with the consequences of their behaviour, getting them to see that they have choices in their lives.

Stewart is constantly praising the council's youth service in the city. "They were very, very good," she says. "When we started, they gave us the framework - insurance, child protection rules, Criminal Records Bureau checks, and all that." But you can't help feeling, as you listen not just to Stewart but to others talking about OTS, that the youth service also rather resented OTS's tough way of working. There is a bluntness with the kids and an ease with making judgments of their behaviour that traditional youth work often eschews. "These young people have a choice," Stewart says. "They can carry on behaving badly, or live decent lives."

She is a great fan of antisocial behaviour orders (Asbos). "They put a brake on someone. They are not a badge of honour. That's ridiculous. They are one of the best things this country has ever done. Young people know when they are committing antisocial behaviour. They need to be told in a direct way. If you water down the challenge, they don't take us seriously."

Of course, as the project became successful, the inevitable happened. The council, in that dreaded automaton phrase, wanted to "roll it out". But you cannot bottle what Stewart and Burley do and just reproduce it in-house. Yet Stewart is again endlessly complimentary. She says the council probably does not have enough money to fund the kind of intensive work that OTS does. It has its own youth service and has to pay for that first. This woman is so damn conciliatory it is remarkable. She wouldn't be that soft on the kids.

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city council needs a tough talking-to, to be served with an Asbo, and told to change its behaviour, and fund this project.

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