

EVERYDAY PEOPLE

WITH CONOR SWEETMAN

EPISODE 2



PAUL BRADY

on Hope, Passion
and Potential

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Episode 2 Transcript

Conor Sweetman (CS):

Thanks for showing me around. Maybe for our listeners maybe can you give us an idea of what you do here at Belvedere Youth Service?

Paul Brady (PB):

Yeah well I'm the general manager of the Belvedere youth club and we're based here on lower Buckingham Street. We're right in the heart of Dublin's north inner city. The youth club is, it's the oldest youth club in the state in actual fact. It was it was formed 1918 by past pupils of Belvedere College. And it was essentially was set up to address the issue of poverty among newspaper sellers. I suppose you know you going back to the 40s in the 50s and even before that, newspaper sellers were on every corner of every street in Dublin and that's where the people got their news. For the vast majority of the club members at that time they were living mainly in the tenement buildings that were littered throughout Dublin at that time. And the housing conditions were just dreadful. You know, you might have five or six families to one of these buildings sharing maybe one or two bathrooms. So living conditions were appalling and they didn't really have an awful lot. So as I said Belvedere College the past pupils got together and formed the Belvedere newsboy's club as it was called at the time and we've been in various locations throughout the city over those over all those years. We opened the current premises here in 1992 after a long fundraising

campaign. I suppose it's important to say that Belvedere Youth Club is a voluntary organization and we have to have a membership of about 350 children and young people both boys and girls from the age of 7 up to their mid 20s. And we provide just a whole range of different programs developmental educational social programs. We try to cater for all the needs, the spare time needs and the social needs that young people have. A lot of our programs would run after school late into the evening and weekends as well. So busy enough.

CS:

So you know an idea of the type of activities and programs.

PB:

Yeah well, every day I suppose do you start off with our afterschool program. Essentially, the primary school children around us would get off school at 2:30 and the youth club is open for them from at three o'clock. So the length of time it takes them to walk from their schools around to the youth club, we're open for it. And when we come in the kids can play football. We've got a fully functioning Sports Centre, sports hall. And we have the computer room. The kids can come and hang out, it's like an Internet space. We have daily Arts Crafts classes. We have a small theatre group. We have a games area, the kids play pool and stuff like that. And we do a whole range of different programs in terms of, we have a Gaisce awards program for example where kids will spend a whole year going to personal development programs and social awareness programs. And attain their silver medal, and their bronze medal, their silver medal and we the group now going for the gold medal in 2017. And we would do programs around alcohol awareness, drugs, substance abuse, positive mental health, sexual awareness. Basically programs that affect youth culture. And we have kids from the age of seven right up to the mid 20s participating in all those programs. We also have, I suppose one of the highlights of any of the kids year is the annual summer camp. The youth club has a house in Blackwater in County Wexford. And we run an annual summer camp and there the kids would get a four or five day stay which is free of charge. All the services are free of charge. For some of the kids who would attend that particular program, that's probably the only holiday they will actually have and they get to spend four days in a residential setting with their mates and just doing all the things that summer holidays are and summer memories are made of. So it's quite wide, it's quite varied. We have homework clubs. We have a lunch club where every kid in come in, every young person comes in, they can get something to eat if they're hungry. I mean basically if looking from a kid's point of view, you're in school from nine o'clock in the morning and they come straight to us after school. The kids are ravenous. So we would provide a hot meal for everybody who wants to have something to eat.

CS:

Super. Unbelievable. So it's in that community up here on Buckingham Street. Can you give us an idea of the context we're in and what you're providing an alternative to?

PB:

Yeah well I mean the north inner city and the inner city as a whole has been well-documented over the years as been one of the most disadvantaged communities in the state. There's a whole range of social problems. From low educational achievement, unemployment has always been high. We have a very high proportion of single parent households headed by the mother, being the only parent there. And we're facing and working with criminal activity among all age groups. And we're dealing with that on a daily basis.

I suppose the biggest issue is the drugs culture now. I mean people would call it a drugs problem, but it's been embedded here now for thirty years plus. It really is a drugs culture. And all the associated crime and criminality that goes with that. And it really has just exploded here over the last number of months with the with the recent spate of gangland killings.

I mean we will have we would have been working with some of the main players over the years. And the extended family members of those players. And it's I suppose it's increasingly sad that you know human life is worthless in value when you know people are murdered on the streets of the city. It really has an effect on not only to the adults in the community, but young people really have a fear. And you know, we had a couple of kids recently come up to me and say, "Paul, don't you only get shot if you're a drug dealer?"

I'm trying to answer this. And trying to assure this young 10 year old girl that you'll be fine going back and forward to school. Because people were being murdered at home, in local pubs, just on the streets. And so it was a huge fear. And then I got to a stage where we overheard a group of boys, of our younger boy, re-enacting the Regency murder. And the kids will be saying, "you take a glock, you have an AK 47, I'll drive the car". I mean these are boys of 10 years of age and are glamorizing this situation. It really is a huge concern to us.

But that just gives a backdrop as opposed to everyday working life here in the area. It's got to a stage now where we have to consider, if we're doing a home visit or a house visit, we have to go around in pairs. Just to ensure that at least somebody will be known locally to the residents because you don't want to be mistaken for hitman because a stranger is walking into a flat complex. So it poses quite a lot of different situations for ourselves to grapple with as professional youth workers.

CS:

Yeah so, I grew up Lusk. So it's only 25 kilometres north of here but a world away. The first job I ever had was on a farm picking tomatoes. So it's very very different. I was interested there, you mentioned it's being glamorized by some of the kids. Would they actually see it as glamorous or that kind of lifestyle as glamorous or attractive in anyway?

PB:

Absolutely. With internet access on my own on phones, on laptops, kids have access to an awful lot more than what I had when I was growing up. It's at our fingertips. Programs like [Love / Hate](#). While that was out, we'd have kids in the youth club planning to bring their toy guns to school so they could play love hate in the playground. And you know it just this this whole TV coverage and media coverage that it's got, you know and young boys in particular are seeing this as a lifestyle choice. You know, there's BMW involved, there's jeeps involved. You know there's [glocks](#). When I was growing up it was cap guns and playing cowboys and Indians. I certainly wasn't discussing glocks and AK 47 and hits. And so yes it really has been glamorized. And young boys in particular would have a tendency to be drawn into that lifestyle.

I suppose the challenge then for us as professional youth workers is, how do we address that? We're looking now trying to get some sort of guidance and best practice from organizations in L.A. and in London who've been dealing with this type of gangland violence for decades. Because it really is all new to us. And with the sums of money that's involved... how can we compete? We're trying to provide a space for young people to come and to play a game a ball of an evening ...when they could be out earning a couple hundred euros a day in some cases selling whatever's available. So it's a concern for us, for us all really, for the future generation.

CS:

And you came here as a kid didn't you?

PB:

Yeah I mean I was born and raised on Sean McDermott Street. I grew up in a flat complex there, St Mary's Mansions. I had a very happy childhood myself. I was coming to my late teens by the time the drugs problem really manifested itself in the late 70s early 80s. So I suppose I was one of the lucky ones. But having said that, I've been to my fair share of funerals and buried classmates and neighbours who weren't so lucky as me. But yeah I joined the youth club when I was 13 years of age. I suppose I really am a product of the Belvedere youth club. I went on to complete the diploma in youth and community work in [Maynooth University](#) in the early 90s.

And a number of years there, I completed a higher diploma in child protection and welfare in [Trinity College](#). So I was the first member of my family to go onto third level education. And you know I'm not alone in that statistic. I mean most people, if they do make it to third level education from the north inner city, would be in the minority. It's not, places are not very well taken for people growing up in the inner city. But yeah I mean I spent most of my life in the youth club. As I say, I joined when I was 13 years of age and I suppose that kind of leads to kids having you asking me questions about you know, "my Da knows from being in this club" and, "how long have you been in the club?". And I tell the kids, "I joined the year that Elvis died". You know, I get away for a couple of years...

CS:

Who's Elvis?

PB:

Exactly the younger kids are telling me now, "who's Elvis?". So I'll have to rethink and try and phrase it differently. But yeah I mean, I joined the youth club at 13 years of age. I hung around and became a volunteer about 15 years of age. I was a volunteer then for about 11 years before before I was approached to run it on a part time basis. I mean I became a plaster for my work and in the mid-80s I found myself walking in on them for a couple of years in London because there was no work in Ireland. I came back in 1990. I actually kept coming back during the summers to help run summer camp from London just to keep up, keep that connection. So I've had a connection with the youth club now for over 30 years and I've been involved in running summer camps and summer programs again for most of those years as well. So it's played a huge part of my life. Interestingly enough, my father would have been one of the original newsboys, selling newspapers on the streets of Dublin all those years ago. And I just followed my two older brothers and sister into the youth club to become a member.

Back then, you have to be 12 years of age to become a member of the youth club. When I took over running the youth club in 1990, I saw there was a real need, a huge need for younger children to be engaged in some sort of project or program. So I immediately lowered the age group to 8 years of age and then I lowered it again to seven years of age to coincide with children in first class being able to become members. We now have a membership of over 360 kids and young people who attend various programs. I suppose an average week, you could have gone to 160 or 170 kids come through the building.

CS:

And when you compare this generation, you mentioned in the drug culture in the area, and that's the main problem you're talking or helping solve, with the

organization. If you compare that to your own generation, what was it like in the area, what were the problems you were tacking at that time?

PB:

Well suppose, unemployment has never gone away really you know. A lot of the problems, a lot of the difficulties associated with the area stems from unemployment. If there is a decent wage going into a household, there's no need to get involved in any criminal activity in order to supplement a family budget or a family allowance. But what's happened recently during the boom, a lot of the young people who grew up through the youth club at that time, they would have got jobs on building sites. Mainly labouring, menial jobs. And of course, the first ones to be hit when the crash arrived were those people involved in the construction industry. And again that's just knocked the community back to where it was many years ago. And add to that, the various different cuts and various charges and the various austerity policies that have been followed by successive governments. We're really just treading water as a community. There's been a lot of regressive policies being made. Education disadvantage is still one of the big barriers for young people going forward and competing for real jobs, meaningful jobs. So it's you know it hasn't really changed that much.

CS:

In your mind, what might say would be the ideal solution or would you have an idea of, if you had an unlimited budget, how would you fix the problem?

PB:

Working with children in isolation is not is not a solution. I think you need at. You need to look at an entire family. Whether there is a mother there and a father. If not you know, if a parent isn't it isn't working, you putting all your energy and time into encouraging a young person to take a job when they've seen generational unemployment is really not the way. Services need to be put to work with families to to encourage parents to take up employment.

CS:

So there's role models there.

PB:

Exactly. Because we find a lot of the times that you know, the staff in the youth club, we are the positive role models in a lot of the lives of the children that are attending here.

CS:

It's fantastic to love the work that you're doing. You obviously have to persevere a lot, and you see kind of the cycle of poverty over the years. What keeps the staff going regarding their own motivation to get up and keep going?

PB

Yeah mean it's a sad indictment of society and of inner city life but when a child joins the youth club, I mean we only need to hear the surname and we can almost map that child's life out. Whether they have a chance. Whether they will just continue with the cycle themselves. I suppose you know for a lot of the girls, we were trying to kind of you know hopefully reduce teenage pregnancy so that the young girl herself could grow and develop. And maybe look at a career choice for themselves before they have children. Which you know a lot of a lot of young girls in the past would have you know found themselves pregnant at an early age. And that's almost the end of the of their career choices.

For the lads... God if we can keep them out of prison. If we can keep them out of what was St Pats. If we can keep them out of [Oberstown](#) now. You know because these all have psychologically negative effects on people as they as they grow up. You know there are certain kind of crimes that just never leave you. You know you might find yourself in a robbed car or a stolen car doing a bit of joy riding in your teens. You know it just follows you around like a bad smell for the rest of your life. You know I mean, in my day you know when I was growing up, we had a fear of putting our real address down on job applications because the neighborhood had that bad of a of a reputation.

I remember my first plastering job after I qualified. I got a job with a small builder and he actually came into what was ANCO at this at the time which is where we did our apprenticeships. And so he wanted the best, top of the list placers. I was up there fortunately. So I got my start with him but after a number of months talking to two men and getting to know them, a conversation was heard whereby this was a family business and a family building building firm. And he explained to me that they actually had a conversation with himself and members of the family around a fear that I might steal something out of the homes that we might be working in because that's when we did small bathroom extensions. And that discriminatory reasoning prevails. But it didn't surprise me. It didn't then and it doesn't surprise me now. You know that people would think along those lines.

If we're looking at a way for children coming through, it really is by completing their secondary school careers as a given. Because early school leaving is just I mean... I do it myself and I'm looking and you know... you're looking for somebody who's you

know stuck with something, stuck in education and has something to offer and an understanding of whatever issues are there.

CS:

Is there peer pressure for them not to stay in school?

PB:

There is always peer pressure. Peer pressure is always a huge point in any young person's life. There's also a push for a young person to earn, to bring money home. And a lot of young people would end up in [youth reach](#) centres, where you get an allowance for attending. So the behavior becomes so disruptive in school that they are referred to a youth centre when they reach their 16th birthday. And they might get 80 euros a week to attend. And a lot of the young people actually will position themselves in such a way that they are prepared to move to complete a school career you know. But they never really complete a school career to an acceptable level. And a lot of young people who would have the ability to go on and do a standard leaving cert would end up doing a leaving cert applied. Which is great because it keeps the person in school up until they're 18. But it will be lower down and done.

CS:

Are there any particular stories of people slipping through the cracks?

PB:

Well I mean how long is a string. I mean like over the years I've we've witnessed quite a number of young lads in particular who have made it to the end of their school career, their secondary school career and have gone on to do a PLC. But at the first assignment they drop out. And a lot of the reason is because there's little or no support at home for that type of learning and that type of research and study that goes with an adult education course or a further education program.

CS:

So the peer pressure is coming from the parents?

PB:

Exactly yeah. A lot of time it's because education didn't feature big in a lot of the parents' lives. They would have left school without completing their own school careers. And this is the cycle that continues and starts again, which leads to poverty. And teenage pregnancies. And young families. And young people having young families. And the cycle starts all over again.

CS:

What help do you get from the government?

PB:

We have it we have a couple of different funded programs. We have a [community employment program](#) for example.

CS:

How does that work?

PB:

A [community employment program](#) is... it's administered by, people used to call it a FÁS course a number of years ago. It's administered by the department of social protection now. Essentially it is an employment activation program whereby people will get an allowance for working 19 and a half hours a week. Unfortunately, the Fine Gael / Labor government that came in the first time... when were they elected, 2011 was it? When they came in, they changed social welfare entitlements so that they took away that allowance. And essentially what is happening now is people will only receive €20 on top of their social welfare entitlements. So essentially they're working for €20 for working a 19 and a half or a week. There's no incentive. And what's happened, about two years ago, we would have had 12 people working with children and young people in our after-school program. We're now down to having two people on that particular program. And now that program is facing closure in the New Year because we're we're facing such a difficult time in recruiting people onto it. So the department of social protection is looking to close that down.

CS:

One of the things I was curious about as you were talking there, you know you joined in 1990, and after a couple of years, you lowered the age.

PB:

I joined in 77. I started running the club in 1990.

CS:

...and then you started lowering the age of entry. And I just thinking to myself, as more people have come do it, it requires more and more resource on the volunteering side, it's a shame to see the community employment numbers dropping...

PB:

Yeah. And I suppose, we have one youth worker post which is funded through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. And in fact only last Thursday, we had the

Minister for Children herself, [Dr. Katherine Zappone](#) came in to visit us. And we had a fantastic visit. She was very impressed with what we do. We explained our resource deficit shall we say. And hopefully we'll be well-placed to increase that number if applications that are accepted again for youth workers. But this is a qualified youth worker. This is a guy, this is a person who's gone on and done a degree in youth work, who understands the issues that young people face on a daily basis and how to, you know, develop a young person. Both physically, mentally, intellectually. And help them, in some small way to prepare them for the future. For their own future.

And so we have one youth worker there. We could do with quite quite a lot more. But as I say we're we've only been given funding for for one. And then we also run a youth diversion project. A [youth diversion project](#) is a response from the Department of Justice to the issue of juvenile crime in the area. As we know the north inner city is one of those areas that has been plagued by criminality of all age groups. And essentially, we have to two full time staff, who work with a number of young people, who've been referred to us the juvenile liaison officers. And so the vast majority of them would have come to the attention of the guards. Although the assessment criteria has changed slightly. We can now work with some young people now who would have a number of deficits in their life. So for example, if they're missing school, if there's criminality either in their background or a member of the family's background, or if they're not doing too well in school already and there's a chance that he may drop out. We could put some extra resources into them. So there are quite a number of different government initiatives that we're running.

But on top of that, the the youth club still need to raise in excess of €270,000 per year just to open our doors. That's to be funded by private fundraising means. So you know quizzes, race nights, the corporate sector if we can get them in. I mean we're just on the doorstep of the financial services center. And to say it's another world over there is an understatement. You just walk into the financial services center and the atmosphere just changes you know. I would be invited into some of the buildings to maybe talk to some of the companies. And to maybe even get some of their old I.T. equipment. And you're walking into what would be hotel type accommodation versus what we have over this side of the pond, or over the side of the road. So it's quite it's quite striking you know. And when the financial services center was conceived, we had high hopes for jobs creation But we would have more people cleaning buildings in the financial service than actually worked there.

CS:

They brought in, as far as I know, a new apprenticeship program. Professional apprenticeships to sit alongside the other vocational ones. Have you heard much in the way of that?

PB:

Not really. We do know of some young people who have jobs in the financial services center. That would probably be the exception to the rule and maybe would have had the support of their family in completing their school career and maybe did a half decent leaving cert to get in there. We would find that if a young person is struggling in school or doesn't enjoy school, then that manifests itself in, you could call it a dead end job or menial work, rather than have a career shall we say.

CS:

Are there any particular success stories of people that stand out to you of people that have gone on and done other things?

PB:

Oh yeah. It's great to see [Wes Hoolahan](#), who's an Irish international. He was in the youth club for many years as a kid. There was quite a number of lads who were League of Ireland players.

CS:

They act as role models then...

PB:

They do. And they come in and you know they have a lot of time for us. Surprising, I suppose, but it just shows how long I've been involved in it, I'm actually working with some of their children now. So yes, there are success stories. It's not all doom and gloom you know. And I suppose if it wasn't for the service that the club offers, you wouldn't really know where some of these kids would end up because there's very little choice out there for children to use their spare time in a kind of a constructive, positive way. And I suppose here at the club we pride ourselves in you know running the vast majority of our programs after school, evening, night time, on the weekends. When young people and kids are available to you you know which is, which is crucial for them because they have somewhere to go straight after school. And it can bring them straight through the evening.

I mean like on a night like tonight, it's mid-November. It's pitch dark, it's freezing cold. You know we've had kids in the building since 3 o'clock. We have a group of young people out playing another youth club you know in a football match. And then have that constant variety of programs to cover every need that we can see.

CS:

I can imagine it's quite demanding on your own time, do you get much time off at all?

PB:

This is a vocation to me. Being a member of the youth group as a kid, it gave me the impression that we can do so much more. And I'm coming at everything I do from a young person's perspective in so far as, you know, open up the times when the kids need you and the young people need you. You know I could come in here at 9:00 o'clock in the morning and knock off at 5:00 and say I've prepared a few homework clubs or stuff like that. But at the end of the day, kids are only available to us after school. Our client group are in school until 3 o'clock. The consequence of that is that, the average working day is just coming to a close at 3 p.m. when we open our doors for our clients. So if the average working day finishes the Five O'Clock, we're just getting started at three o'clock. And that's the way it should be.

And if we had the resources in terms of staffing, we'd open the place on the weekends. But we just don't have the staff, we don't have the resources. The kids are out there. There's a need. But you know government just doesn't seem to be putting the resources where it's needed. I mean there are no votes, young people can't vote.. We have to wait for a knee jerk reaction and before the government does something. So we're actually waiting on the findings of a report that was commissioned by An Taoiseach [Enda Kenny](#) into the gangland situation. And Kieran Mulvey, who has experience working on all with a whole range of groups, I think using the work Relations Commission at one stage. He has been tasked to come up with this report which will inform a new task force. And we're hoping that the submissions that we made will have some bearing on maybe get some extra resources into some extra youth workers put into the area. And certainly put into the youth club here so we can offer more programs to more kids. And try and address those issues that are really taking all the media coverage, from a negative perspective, from inner city life. Because there's much more to it than that. I mean the city is made up of great families just trying to do the best they can by raising their kids in very difficult circumstances. It's it's been neglected over generations. The fabric of the area has been neglected as well as the inhabitants of the inner city.

It's funny. From my perspective, I'm also the chairperson of one of the local schools here, one of the local primary schools here. The [central model senior school](#). At the last count we've we have children from 30 different nationalities in our school. There's a vibrancy that can be tapped into. And we want our kids to integrate with these newcomer families. But there's very little of it going on outside of school because there's just no resources for it. And it's a shame really because there are great families in this in this area, in this community. And we just have we're just dealing with problem after problem. Whether it's unemployment, whether it's the drugs problem, whether it's criminality, or it's low educational achievement. But there is great potential. These people are fantastic.

You know I have, but I moved out of the area. I live in Donameade now. I moved out about 15 years ago. And you know we had our first child, so we needed a bigger house and blah blah blah. I spend most of my week back here in the inner city. I wouldn't do the work if I didn't like it if I didn't enjoy it. And obviously I see the need, and I see the benefits of running a program and like above the Belvedere Youth Club.

CS:

It's super. I have to say I really admire you because just even thinking about, you're dealing with other people's problems all day, and you're just trying to help other people the whole time. It's absolutely fantastic. Your own family now, are they involved in the club?

PB:

Yes, believe or not. My son comes in on a regular basis. Conor. Conor, he's 15. When he was in primary school, he used to come in straight away after school, and I obviously spend the day in the youth club and be involved in all the programs that were going on. Now that he's 15, he has his own friends, and I suppose he wouldn't be in as much as possible.

I met my wife through the youth club. Jackie. We met many years ago. Jackie would have been a member of the youth club. Jackie was a volunteer at youth club as well for many years. And she's... it was funny because our lunch club that we run, we lost the last person on our community employment program that was staffing that particular area. It would've been about two years ago. Essentially, the social welfare again have a lot to answer for because they changed the entitlements of people to such an extent that they couldn't be in receipt of any social welfare payment and work here. So that particular person had to leave. And we had nobody to make the meals for the kids. So literally, I had to go home to my wife and say, "Jackie...You'll have to jack in...". She was working in a newsagent there. I said, "you'll have to give that up and come in and give us a hand in the club". And so she's been part-time employed with us ever since. But still looking to get back to doing what she wants to do. But we just we just can't do without her.

You know, the lunch club is probably one of the first programs that the kids inquire about when they come in the door. It's usually, "what's for dinner?" you know. And if you didn't have it... I mean the kids having something to eat adds so much to their day because it allows them to concentrate more. If they're not hungry and then they're not thinking, "oh I have to go home and get me dinner first". So they come to us straight away. And you know, they have something to eat and then they straight race back to their activity. Because they just want to... school's out so it's fun time. It's such a simple thing but it really does have a huge effect, not only on the kids

themselves but on your program and your ability to deliver a program. And we are thankful... I mean we have to give credit where credit is due... Citibank who who operate their main building on the quays there. They actually fund our lunch club. We're very grateful to them. The lunch club would produce about 14,000 meals per year. Exactly. So when you put it in that context, it's really important.

And I suppose there's another initiative. There's a company over in the financial services center called Kleinwort Benson's investments. I think they've changed their name. They put another word or name onto the end of that. They reached out to us and they wanted to do something. So I went over and I spoke to their corporate responsibility committee. And they now send down two of their staff on a Thursday afternoon to volunteer for two hours each week. So it's about 22 members of staff and have all put themselves forward to go on a rota to come over to help run that time frame that I'm really struggling with. Which is a very innovative way of giving. And it's giving time rather than money which is good. But I mean like if I was to pay for those on a staffing basis, that will be a significant you know cost to us. And if more people were inclined in that way, we could do more.

CS:

So at this point in time, what excites you most about the club?

PB:

Just the vibrancy. Just the energy. I mean young people just are so resilient. I mean for what's going on in their community, in their area and even in our families. To come around here day after day and just be as happy and as cheerful and to be as open to what we want to do with them, which is, we want to develop them forward for them. And we're constantly selling them new ideas about you know, "get involved in this little group... you know you learn a bit more about personal development... you learn a bit more about giving".

I mean we have a fantastic Gaisce awards program at the minute. Some of our young people finished completed their bronze award last year in 2015. They're due to finish their silver award this side of Christmas. And we're already looking at our gold award in 2017.

CS:

This is the president's award?

PB:

The president's award, yeah. And it's very rare that you get a group of young people to go on to do the gold award. Even schools will have a difficulty with it.

CS:

I think I remember... I was in scouts. And there would have been a couple of hundred people in Lusk in scouts. And one person or two people I would have known....

PB:

Yes. Absolutely. And we are amazed at how well they've they've taken do it. But one of the issues they're on board with is actually, as part of their gold award is to go to a third world country and work with a community over there which is more disadvantaged than where they're coming from.

CS:

And have people done that yet?

PB:

No, they haven't done that yet. As I say, 2017 is the year that we're going to take that on board. I mean our young people are backpacking to come up with the budget for their fares and their accommodation. So they're open to... Young people are open to a whole range of different programs and different ideas and concepts of what youth work is.

And I suppose another element there is getting people to have a voice and really give them the knowledge that your voice is there to be heard. And we're trying to increase, making them better citizens for their own community. And giving them the knowledge that they can have a say in what happens in their community.

For example we have great relationship with the local Dublin City Council office and we've we've recently started working with them on their [Adopt A Street initiative](#). We've adopted Buckingham Street. And we would have the kids out litter-picking and painting of railings. And just taking that almost ghetto look of the place. But these are kids that are doing it themselves and they're helping. There's an understanding then that they want to go home and tell them that their parents or brothers or sisters, "don't be throwing that on the ground. We're picking up there. These are our streets..." It's just to get a message across that they're a valued member of society and a valued member of their community.

CS:

And since you've been involved as the general manager, what has been the most positive development that you've seen over the 20 odd years?

PB:

Trying to get across to kids and young people that education is their future. And the importance of their education. And we have, we're actually supporting one young person who was a member of the youth club since he was seven. He's actually in his

third year doing the degree program in Maynooth University in community and youth work. And the youth club is covering his fees. And we're supporting him in every way we can. And we have just received scholarship funding for two more kids to go on to further education and we're hoping to get people young people to a four year degree program. One wants to be an accountant. One wants to be a midwife ...or an air hostess. How do they marry together?

We want to try to get kids to believe that, "listen if you have an idea, if you have a dream if you see yourself in 10 years time as having a career that is, you can achieve it, you can achieve it".

And if we can help them achieve it in whatever way we can, we're certainly going to be there to help them. So it's that constant, instilling that belief in young people that, "you're entitled to a full education and a full life as well as anybody from Clontarf, Blackrock, or any of the other suburbs". And if we can level the playing fields for them, we're happy to do that.

CS:

That's brilliant. That's probably a good place to end. Thanks an awful lot for taking the time to have a chat with me. Just as one final point maybe, or maybe two, if you could tell people where they can hear more about the Belvedere Youth Center. And if you have any ask audience or anything you'd like people to do, or anyway they can get involved.

PB:

You could check out our Web site. It's belvedereyouthclub.ie. There's a lot of information there as to what we do, what we need. Our Facebook page is there. Just log onto [Facebook and Belvedere Youth Club](#). You'll get a flavour and an idea of the breadth of the work that we do because there's so much going on and we have constant updates.

In terms of what people can do I mean, anything that people feel could be a benefit to us, drop us an email, drop us a line and we'll contact you. If you have a few hours of an evening that you'd like to volunteer, we'd certainly like to talk to you about that as well. If you can point us in the direction of extra resources, extra funding. For example, for our lunch club we use the local food bank to try and offset some of the costs. Now I know there are food clouds. And there are initiatives with some local supermarkets to try to get food and stuff like that. But we will be doing 60 meals a day. So I couldn't be dropping anything to go up and get a couple a bowls of soup from a restaurant or a few sliced pans. It just it's not viable for us. At a very basic level, think of what it's like to cook fish fingers and chips for 60 kids. How many fish fingers do you need? If you're getting a few packets of chicken or a few packets of

fish fingers or a few packets of sausages, you find you're doing three times the work in preparing several different meals for kids.

So I mean like how long is a piece of string. You know regarding equipment obviously funding is is a huge issue.

I suppose my biggest wish list at the minute is staff. We really need staff. Full-time qualified staff, is is what's required.

But as I said if people have the tendency to be volunteers or would like to volunteer, get in touch us and could certainly use you.

CS:

Well, Paul. Thanks very much for the time again. And for those listening, Belvedereyouthclub.ie. Thanks for that. Cheers. Bye bye.