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Scots kids have boxing club funds wiped out by vanishing salesman

Aug 22 2010 Jane Barrie, Sunday Mail

The lads of Lochaber Phoenix Boxing Club were pleased as punch when a firm offered them two new training rings at a fraction of the normal price.

They paid £2666 to The National Task Force (NTF), based in Belfast, and were promised delivery within a fortnight.

But they were KO'd when the order failed to materialise and NTF folded.

Niall Clark, a coach at the Fort William club, said: "This has wiped out our funds. I am gutted for the boys."

They signed up with NTF in June.

Niall, 39, said: "NTF claimed to be a non-profitmaking organisation who wanted to help community groups. They said they gave large discounts to voluntary organisations."

Niall paid £1650 for a competition ring and a further £1016 for a training ring by bank transfer to Mark Townley's personal account. He said: "Townley said he needed the money straight away to push the order through."

When nothing arrived, Niall phoned NTF to be told that there was a hold-up at the suppliers.

Niall said: "We were given excuse after excuse."

The next thing he knew, he received a letter claiming the firm had ceased trading. That's when he called me in.

I discovered that the Fort William boys are not alone. Glasgow club Kelvin ABC and Durie's Boxing Gym, in Rutherglen, Lanarkshire, are also out of pocket by £1650 each.

Jackie Durie, who runs the 60-strong Rutherglen group with husband Archie, said: "The kids are devastated. We are putting on a big show next year and needed the new ring for that."

She demanded a refund and received a cheque, but it bounced.

David Cardwell, of Kelvin ABC in Govanhill, said: "We also got a refund cheque which bounced. We're going to have to work really hard to get on our feet again and pay bills."

Townley, it seems, is a busy man. NTF had also been running a minibus scheme in Northern Ireland where community groups were offered a new vehicle if they paid £4800 up front. The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action have received 15 complaints.

My investigators tracked him to an address in Bangor, Co. Down, but he had clearly gone to ground. Neighbours said he hadn't been seen.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland say they are investigating.

Meanwhile, insolvency firm Libertas Associates, of Bushey, Hertfordshire, have been appointed to wind up NTF.

Nicholas Barnett, of Libertas, said: "I've received written instructions from Mr Townley to convene meetings of members and creditors of NTF in accordance with Section 98 of the Insolvency Act for the purpose of placing the company into creditors' voluntary liquidation.

"I'm awaiting payment for providing this service prior to instigating work on this case."

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