

Website Case Study

Yarnfield Village, Staffordshire
June 2005



Summary

Yarnfield Village in Staffordshire has suffered from a lack of youth provision and youth support for some time, and with high levels of reported occurrences of anti-social behaviour. Community led consultation has been undertaken with local residents and young people in order to look into the underlying issues relating to youth and to develop a Ward Action Plan.

Project description

The typically English village of Yarnfield, Staffordshire was brought to the notice of the nation when a breakthrough case was won by local residents and the Police. More than 50 people living in Yarnfield came forward to give evidence of anti-social behaviour, including some who had covertly filmed youths.

Some of the behavior complained about included: verbal abuse to residents, vandalism to a bus shelter, damage to vehicles, starting fires and ramming wheelie bins into front doors. The case against eight boys and three girls described as a 'landmark' by Police – was then the largest ever single application for ASBOs.

Soon after these ASBO's were issued The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation (NIF) was commissioned by Stafford Borough Council to work with local residents and young people to carry out community consultations in order to develop a Ward Action Plan and also to be used as a consensus building exercise to look at some of the causes and solutions to the issues.

Who was involved?

Anti Social Behaviour Co-ordinator, Community Development Workers. Councillors, Youth Service, local Yarnfield residents and young people in running the consultation process.

Consultation was undertaken using the Planning for Real^{®1} community consultation process. At a separate Youth Consultation event, 49 young people participated in putting forward their views about potential changes whilst some of the young people affected by the Anti-Social Behaviour Orders were also encouraged to put their views forward.

1021 individual comments and suggestions were given, including 150 suggestions put forward at the Youth consultation event.

The main conclusions were requests for accessible leisure facilities / activities for all ages, but particularly for young people. There are already some leisure facilities: at Yarnfield Park (BT's Training Centre), at a privately owned football ground and on the large village green but sadly, none of these are easily used because of cost or local by-laws.

Traffic and Crime were also identified as areas of concern to the residents – with most of these being related to the density / speed of traffic and also the anti-social behaviour problem, however, this now being less prevalent due to the influence of the ASBO's.

Although the consultation process was ultimately used to develop a Ward Action Plan; it had a strong emphasis on engaging the views of young people and to also work with young people in prioritising the outcomes of their needs.

It was been noted that some difficulties did arise:

- Encouraging participation from some of the young people relating to the Anti-Social Behaviour Orders was difficult and only made possible by the hard work from the Anti Social Behaviour Co-ordinator. It was also difficult to change some of the very negative opinions of residents whose views included a presumption that issues relating to young people with the Anti-Social Behaviour Orders would still be prevalent even if young people were given youth facilities.
- It was difficult to get young people to the prioritisation event where it would be useful to bring young people and older residents together to discuss local issues.

High on the list of priorities for many residents are young people's support and social activities.

There has been a positive reaction and several working parties have now been established to deal with expressed issues:

¹ Planning for Real is a registered trademark of The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation

- The Probation Service is helping by getting some of its clients to trim back bushes in areas that were highlighted as having a lack of lighting and where there was a fear of crime
- Indoor curling facilities have been bought using funding from the Community Champions (DFES)
- Skateboard and mountain bike activities are also being funded through the Community Champions (DFES)

Conclusions

During the consultation events, many residents spoke about the lack of facilities in the area for young people and most felt this contributed to some of the problems of anti social behaviour that had occurred. Suggestions were made that a Youth Club was needed locally and the village hall, the school and at Yarnfield Park (BT Training Centre) were identified as potential sites.

It was also highlighted that some youth support and counselling sessions could run alongside this type of facility. Additional suggestions were made about the need for a dedicated space for young people. Ideas were put forward about developing a youth theatre and an arts and crafts club locally. Facilities that a number of neighbourhoods in many areas have recently had sited, aimed at young people, were ramps and half-pipes for skateboarding and rollerblading and this was reflected during the consultation.

Key Points

Throughout the consultation process and, in particular, through discussions with young people, it became apparent that peer pressure had a large effect on the number of anti-social behaviour issues and therefore the number of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders issued. Recommendations put forward have not only been the need for diversionary activities for young people but for further work with these young people to discuss the reasoning behind poor behaviour.

Through conversations with a number of the young people involved it also became apparent that any involvement of young people through consultation on things that they would like to be seen in an area must not be used in order to raise expectations. There were a number of comments from young people such as “it was a waste of time” and that “nothing ever gets done”.

Apathy can be a fundamental issue in many deprived areas where any result from consultation must be that people, and in particular young people, see physical changes take place.

Since the consultation – updated 2007

Stafford Borough Council's Anti Social Behaviour Team has highlighted the fact that whilst it is too early to assess whether instances of anti social behaviour (ASB) have reduced as a result of the consultation exercise, it has brought members of the community together.

ASB practitioners will be readily aware that tackling ASB often requires a degree of bridge-building between 'polarised' views and perceptions – especially when tackling youth-related ASB.

Stafford's ASB Team report that there are now better community links, better understanding of the causes of ASB and closer working relationships between the community and young people. This is evident from wider community support for the youth facilities that have been established or are being developed.

For further information – please contact NIF:- paul_higgitt@nif.co.uk