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The 'R U Listening?' Project

ALAC is concerned with closing gaps between generations, and in promoting conversations between adults and children to promote learning in adults. For example, in an effort to create links between the generations, young people in Primary Schools in the Lincoln area, together with parents and teachers, have been involved in the "R U Listening 2 Us?" project since January 2006.

An earlier pilot project was run in the Grantham area between 2004-2005 with successful outcomes. It involved engaging local people to first identify and then work together to address issues of local concern. In many cases, the issues which concerned young people were very similar to those identified by representatives of older generations in a separate study.

For example, the issue of litter was of concern in two schools.

The pupils at Huntingtower School also identified graffiti in the nearby underpass as an area of concern. To try and change their peers' attitudes towards how they disposed of their litter, the group designed litter bins which they felt would be more appealing, and worked with a Lincolnshire artist who specialised in metalwork to adapt their designs.

To find a solution to the graffiti issues, the group contacted Network Rail to express their concerns, and lobbied for the area to be redecorated, with successful results for the local community. Similarly, at Spitalgate School, issues involving litter and disposal of cigarette waste were addressed by the purchase of attractive new bins for the school playground, and the running of a poster competition by the pupils to influence the behaviour of adults near the school. Later, the group arranged for 'No Smoking' signs and a cigarette litter facility to be sited at the school entrance.

Also within the Grantham trial, local groups, including schoolchildren, identified issues with traffic speed near schools, and problems with dog fouling. In partnership with the local authority's road safety team, the pupils of National School were trained to use speed monitoring equipment to record traffic speed over a set period.

At Barkston & Syston School, the pupils tackled dog fouling problem by organising a petition and lobbying the local Parish Council to erect Dog Litter bins. In both cases, successful outcomes illustrate the value of community involvement.

Following this trial period, in 2006 further community engagement began in the Lincoln area, involving assisting young people to identify issues which concerned them. This was achieved through a Theatre in Education workshop, facilitated by the Rhubarb Theatre Company in January of that year at Lincoln University. The workshop not only enabled the young people to identify issues of concern in their local communities, but also helped them to communicate their concerns to adult representatives from local public services. It opened up dialogues between young people and adults in the public sector which had not previously existed, and is engaging young people in active citizenship projects - empowering them to make a positive difference to the communities in which they live.

In the Lincoln area project, groups have identified issues like excessive volume and speed of traffic outside one school, the reclamation of a public space opposite another school, dangerous litter and graffiti in the locality of another, and a lack of appropriate play facilities to replace an all-weather sports field site which had been built on.



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These issues are seen by the young people as a cause of anti-social behaviour in their community. Their concerns are shared by adults in the localities, but finding a channel through which to effect change is often the stumbling block which inhibits action. ALAC Lincolnshire/ East Midlands is providing an opportunity for young people to achieve success which will encourage them to become active citizens as adults.

Difficulties have been encountered in persuading some agencies of the importance of hearing what young people have to say and actually engaging them in the process. On the other side of the equation there have been difficulties experienced by schools in finding space in the crowded timetable to devote to this more practical aspect of the Citizenship curriculum.

A possible solution to this situation might be to target the voluntary youth groups in future.

It is important, however, to acknowledge the value of the experience gained by all concerned in the schemes which are currently running and which have already taken place, and the good practice identified will be shared and built on in the future.



Equally the various public sector agencies engaged in the dialogue with these young people are recognising the value of listening to and acting upon the concerns raised. Reflecting on the process of engaging local public sector agencies and young people in schools, it is evident that there is a willingness on both parts to effect positive change, but the barriers to progress should also be recognised.

Approaches to Good Practices:

- Providing spaces for conversations between children and adults
- Including the outcomes of these conversations in decision-making processes
- Conducting real conversations rather than patronising participants or displaying a condescending attitude
- Reinforcing relationships between communities, parents and schools
- Allowing the local residents to set the agenda and prioritise their concerns