

'BUZZ OFF' campaign

Charmain, Danielle, Lewis and Barry write about the Corby Young People Friendly Neighbourhood Project.

As part of the Young People Friendly Neighbourhood Project, which is a lottery funded project that is run by Groundwork North Northants, we were asked to participate in the National Youth Agency's (NYA) conference in 2007 on the ten year strategy for youth. The reason we were invited was that we had as part of our project conducted a community audit in our area looking at community safety issues and how they affect young people. We had begun to believe that with the correct skills we could influence decision making in our area. We had begun to talk to key stakeholders within our own community and could see that as long as we knew the facts and could debate in an appropriate manner people would take us seriously.

Within the conference we facilitated workshops around community safety discussing, amongst other initiatives to combat anti-social behaviour, the Mosquito device. We were amazed that so many adult professionals did not know what they were and once they did know what they were they were outraged. We heard comments like 'If it was a device that specifically targeted one ethnic group it would be outlawed' or 'We are a nation who demonises young people'.

When evaluating the sessions we were all in agreement that we should do something to try and get rid of Mosquito devices. With the support of our youth worker we contacted our local police and council and asked to meet with them. We put forward our case ensuring at all times that it was clear we did not condone anti-social behaviour, just that we felt there were more appropriate methods of reducing such behaviour. We believed, and still do, that detached youth workers

and talking CCTV cameras are more appropriate because they target the offenders and are not indiscriminate.

We were able to enlist the help of National Youth Agency (NYA) and 11 MILLION, the Children's Commissioner's organisation, as well as Phil Hope, our local MP. The campaign became national and we were proud to be a part of it.

Nearly a year on we are proud of our achievements. We have had all devices in our local area turned off and some major companies have ceased use of them. We have maintained the support of our local MP who ran an online survey which proved that people would prefer to see more Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) and detached workers on the street. We have visited other areas although success has been limited. We have raised our profile through presentations at universities, councils and newspaper and television reports and although we have much support the company who use them are now changing frequency so that a wider age range of people can hear them. This does not please us: it may mean that we as young people are no longer being discriminated against, but that was

never our strongest argument. We believe that the people committing the anti-social behaviour are the only ones who should be punished and that a blanket response that targets everyone is ineffective and rather than becoming a solution to the problem actually increases social problems.

In future we would like to see a legal test case that could prove damage to someone's health so that the company is banned from using the device. We have arranged several meetings with the owner of Compound Security, the manufacturers of the Mosquito device, but he has failed to turn up. If we are unsuccessful in getting a ban we would at least like to see some real regulation on the devices that would minimise the health risk to normal people.

Our advice to other young people is to never give up and to ask for help where needed. We have been fortunate to live in a country where the Children's Commissioner is a real advocate for children and young people and where we have the support of agencies such as the National Youth Agency and Groundwork North Northants proving that young people really do have a voice. We live in a democracy but as they say, 'All men are equal but some are more equal than others'. That was never truer in terms of age; we still believe that in many cases young people are thought to be less important than older members of the community. It is up to us to show them that we are the voice and voters of the future. ■

