

March 1997 saw the launch of the Philip Lawrence Awards - a Home Office scheme to recognise groups of young people (aged 11-20) who have made an outstanding contribution to good citizenship. Six groups had been chosen as examples of the variety and quality of the projects which the Philip Lawrence Awards would recognise. The areas covered included crime prevention, drug

Frances Lawrence and her family to the attention of the public. In her response to the press, Frances Lawrence, herself a teacher, demonstrated dignity and bravery, a lack of bitterness and a refusal to resort to condemnation of the perpetrators of her husband's death. In the place of the expected response the public heard a challenge that each of us examine our own conscience and ask ourselves what part we play, as members of a nation, in the upbringing of our future citizens.

This was the theme that Frances Lawrence took up when I interviewed her at her home in London in May 1997. She began by speaking about one of the projects that she had seen.

One group of boys in Tredegar in Gwent had a project on joy riding. One of the boys who used to do this joyriding decided that it would be interesting if you could stop someone when they go up to a car, give them a chance to stop and think "I've got a choice here. Do I do good or do I do bad?" and that seemed to be the question that motivated them and started the project. And once it's motivated then there is tremendous energy and spirit. Unfortunately, they don't often have the role models to direct this. I'm very interested in the whole subject of mentoring, creating a network of mentors. I have met many young people who have never had a role model in their lives. I know there are mentoring schemes around but I think it could be much more widespread.

It would require a lot of adults who would be prepared to give time. That's interesting in itself. Some time ago I was talking to the President of the Scout Association who told me that they have numerous requests from young people wanting to be scouts but they didn't have adult volunteers. It seemed to him that everybody has such busy lives in the day and when they came home in the evening they look forward to having dinner and slumping in front of the television. I think there's something in that. I see an 'inside' culture, an 'interior' world, and I'm sure, I'm absolutely sure that it's got something to do with the increase in violence. Young people are deprived of just going out and experiencing things that aren't material.

I went to talk with a group of young people in a youth club the

other day. They were all disillusioned. They came over to me as having a very negative view of themselves and society in that they see it as a violent society and therefore they have to go out and carry knives. But several of them came out and said they liked the kind of situation we were in at the moment where we were actually discussing something - that was something they would like much more of. I suppose in the end it's a kind of human exposure isn't it? Some kind of sympathetic communication with someone else. This whole thing used to disturb us a lot. Philip met it every day at school - the whole inner city culture - not that we had the answers but we tried to open up the possibility of communication.

I am concerned about the national curriculum with its emphasis on the academic. That's fine, in a sense, of course, but the whole concept of citizenship is now seen as extraneous. I feel it should be integral. Good teachers, of course, bring this sort of work out in their particular subjects but pupils can lose out. They are very unconscious of the world outside and they don't actually know or care what's going on. We've tried for some considerable time and not just since Philip died to introduce more than qualifications. It seems to me that education should be about learning to ask questions, encouraging students to seek outside themselves.

There is so much good in young people and we as adults do not always recognise or respond to it and we should. I remember, shortly after Philip's death, I was stuck in a traffic jam on the North Circular Road and a group of boys came up to the car and started banging on the window. I did not know what to think. Then one of them reached into his pocket and pulled out a crumpled copy of The Times with an article and a photograph of me. They had recognised me and they wanted to talk. And we did talk until the traffic started moving and I had to go. And when things get difficult, and when I feel there is no point, I remember this - they wanted to make contact.

Further details of the Philip Lawrence Awards can be obtained from: Home Office, Room 938, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT. The closing date for this year's nominations is 10th September 1997.

Frances Lawrence talks to Mary Eaton



education and joyriding. Each project involved young people making sustained effort and taking initiative in promoting the well-being and viability of local communities. By publicising and publicly applauding such initiatives the panel of judges hopes to encourage a positive response from young people to the world around them. Establishing the Award in the name of Philip Lawrence is a recognition of the values which governed the life and work of a dedicated head teacher. These values are shared by Frances Lawrence, his wife, who is one of the panel of judges.

Philip Lawrence was killed in December 1995, outside his school, as he went to the aid of a pupil who was being attacked. The death of a head teacher in those circumstances stimulated a debate on safety in schools, lawlessness amongst young people and the violence of youth. It also brought