

Report of the Activities of the Radstock Youth Partnership since its inception until January 2013, as presented to the Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel for Early Years, Children and Young People.

Background

The story begins, for some of the founding members of the Youth Partnership, with the threat in 2006 to close the B&NES led Radstock Youth Services down, and reduce it to a white van with two detached workers targeting trouble spots in Radstock, Westfield and Norton. The B&NES contribution to the salary of a detached youth worker who was leading a programme with volunteer support directed by Churches Together in Radstock, was cut and since the churches could not supply the deficit, the service ended. In 2007 a 'night café' opened at St Nicholas Church tea rooms, but it was on the wrong night to attract young people and the format was wrong. Lessons were learnt, but the campaign launched to keep the youth centre opened brought the needs of young people in Radstock to public attention, especially when youth workers made contact with about 8-10 young homeless people 'squatting' in the old St Nicholas C of E School, Church Street, Radstock. Then Cllr David Spiers, Cllr Nathan Hartley, Cllr Eleanor Jackson and a community activist, Dr Chris Lamb, joined two mothers of homeless boys to campaign for better provision for 16-25 year olds who are either alienated from their parents, or in trouble, or thrown out of home when their parents re-marry or disappear. Through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Children and Young People, as the PDS panel then was, a study was done (the so-called Friedman Report 2010) which was presented to the Scrutiny committee and to Council. It confirmed an earlier pilot study by the YMCA in 2008 concerning the scale and extent of the problem, and the inadequacy of provision for all but 'looked after' children. It recommended a foyer providing youth club activities and support for the young homeless.

Grounds for the campaign.

Apart from the specific problems of about 250 'sofa surfers' in finding suitable local accommodation, it emerged that the best all round solution was prevention, as so many lacked educational qualifications and needed to be in a tailored NEETS programme, were depressed and unhappy and needed counselling, and would avoid getting on their parents' nerves if they had more creative pursuits and outlets for their energy. However the work taking place at that time in Radstock for young people was put in jeopardy by the restructuring of the Youth service and the philosophy underpinning it concerning a 'targeted' service managed from Peasedown St John. The restructuring reduced the amount of staff capacity at Radstock Youth Hub from 63 hours to just 20 hours. In practice this meant that the Youth Hub lost both its professional range worker and its outreach team. In response, young people from Radstock addressed the Overview and Scrutiny Panel in September 2010 along with members of the other centres under threat in an attempt to mitigate the effect of the proposed restructuring of the Youth Service. In this situation, the Radstock Youth Partnership was formed with a wider membership than at present (comprising Cllr Jackson, NRTC town councillors, church people and community activists) to campaign to save the

youth service. This led them to work closely with the young people of Radstock. Unable to prevent what was happening, RYP did their best to support the new staff members running the Hub and to support the young people of Radstock with this transition. In 2010 and 2011 RYP were entertained by the young people of Radstock youth hub to a wonderful Christmas lunch in recognition of what they were doing.

RYP has always been a non-party political/cross party group and has always endeavoured to include the young people themselves as well as representatives from across the community, most crucially the existing providers of local youth work. In May 2011 the incoming Lib Dem administration put the cuts on hold, and gave £15,000 to the RYP to develop programmes with the young people. It is to account for that £15,000 that this report is submitted today.

Present Challenges

The basic challenge is the same as elsewhere in B&NES, to deliver a comprehensive in-depth youth service in an area identified since 2004 as suffering from multiple social and economic deprivation which, by working with the young people themselves, meets the needs of community. The same financial constraints exist as elsewhere, and there has been the same impact from the loss of experienced, senior officers, but in Radstock, though the provision of formal services is quite good in terms of schools, a doctors' surgery, shops, churches and voluntary societies, there is a dearth of money and volunteers, and a formidable list of additional problems.

A major problem is the geographical spread of the villages which comprise Radstock ward, from Clandown which is in the ecclesiastical parish of St John's Church, Midsomer Norton to Haydon village which grew up around the Kilmersdon colliery and was closely tied to Kilmersdon in Somerset, and from Writhlington, an independent Anglo-Saxon settlement also mentioned in the Domesday Book, later with its own pits and railway line to Combend, where the canal basin was, and the gasworks. Lower Whitelands is behind the Tynning Batch, and the young people there are truly isolated, though just above the National Cycletrack. An effective youth programme would provide unity and focus but young people have said they are afraid to come down into central Radstock at night because of the dark and the lack of pavements. For the same reason, the lack of rural transport after 5pm, Writhlington School runs its clubs and sports in the lunch hour. Until it closed for refurbishment earlier this year, the snooker hall at the Victoria Hall provided the only low cost activities which were not part of a private club serving alcohol. Young people collect in the centre of Radstock with little to do, and disturb the neighbours. They are then prey to drug dealers. Young people's substance misuse is a serious concern for frontline staff working with young people in the area.¹

¹ See information on Norton Radstock in the Report to the PDS Wellbeing Panel 18 January 2013
Agenda Item 16 *Substance Misuse Services*

Formation of the Partnership

The Partnership began as an ad hoc group of people concerned about the cuts to the youth services in Radstock who were listening informally to young people about what they wanted and who in the case of one trustee, wanted a youth club to be available for his grandson, just as it was for him. The clergy of the Church of England churches in Radstock and Westfield, the Methodist minister and the Baptist minister were involved from the beginning. Several town councillors also came to a meeting with Paula Bromley and other B&NES officers, and Eleanor Jackson, Radstock B&NES councillor and later town councillor became Secretary. Amanda Leon, a community activist, was for a time Treasurer, and invaluable support throughout has been given by Brian Perrett, Chair of the Radstock Residents' Association. Cllrs Simon Allen (Lib.Dem, Radstock) and Rob Appleyard (Labour, Westfield) have attended some meetings. The Partnership has been driven by Sarah Westell, a community activist from Haydon. Some people left when the group ceased to be so much of a pressure group and more a channel of opportunities, and adopted a more formal structure to meet its new financial responsibilities. The Partnership is indebted to officers Paula Bromley and Dave Dixon, and councillors Nathan Hartley and Dine Romero for support and advice. It is always looking for more trustees. Since 2012 the Youth Parliament Representative for NE Somerset, Will Bridge, has played a welcome role.

The Partnership is managed by a committee of trustees who are appointed at the Annual General Meeting of the Partnership. In order to carry out the Partnership's purpose, the Trustees are authorised to:

- To raise funds for agreed practical needs and apply them, and to channel voluntary efforts.
- To co-operate with Churches Together in Radstock and other community groups, charities and organisations with similar aims and objectives.
- To hold B&NES Council and other statutory bodies to account for their responsibilities to and for young people.

Aims and Aspirations

These are encapsulated in the following paragraphs from the Constitution of the Radstock Youth partnership as adopted in September 2011:

- To maintain, improve and promote youth work in Radstock and the surrounding area so as to ensure young people exceed their own expectations and achieve their potential.
- To ensure that the voice of the young people of the Radstock area is always heard in consultation, discussion, planning and representation at all levels.
- To ensure that all young people in the Radstock area have access to and support from qualified youth workers regardless of their background, beliefs or gender in accordance with the Partnership's Equalities Statement.

- To enlist the widest possible community and Council support in doing the above, and providing the means to achieve our aims.

The Path Travelled

As has already been stated, the group formalised itself as a Partnership with a Constitution, officers and trustees, but has tended to meet on an ad hoc basis when the need arose, and communicates mainly by email. It has always been a network, connecting different groups and communities and providing a point of contact for young people who want to obtain equipment, try a new experience or whatever. Some of them have even engaged with Radstock in Bloom and explained to the S.W. in Bloom judges the merits of their vegetable growing/healthy eating project. There are also good links with Writhlington School and with Norton Radstock College. In September 2011 RYP organised an 'away day' for themselves for training in youth work organisation with a consultant. This is because from the outset they considered that youth work today should be done by professionals and themselves as support, because there is more to it than providing a table tennis table and stopping the fights.

Initially after the 2011 election there was pressure on the group to become a third sector organisation, find premises and employ youth workers directly to run programmes but the group decided that a) this was B&NES responsibility as defined by the wishes of the electorate and b) they did not have the competence, time or ability to do this. They did try to find out as much they could about Keynsham youth services, and two members visited the Chew Valley Youth Trust. The aim was also to work as closely as possible with Westfield Town Council, who could support some youth work, while Radstock Town Council could not. A number of models were studied, and rejected.

Another issue was how to provide opportunities across Radstock, and not just in the centre. So work has been done in Haydon and Clandown, but as yet too little in Writhlington where sporting activities are now starting.

The reasons for the apparent delays in using the £15,000 from the Council were the interminable length of time it took the Radstock Branch of Natwest to set up a bank account, and secondly delays in getting the survey done. Additionally once the survey was completed, RYP felt it was important to provide increased opportunities at the Youth Hub, but given the reduced capacity, the funding need to be inserted slowly to ensure the staff were not overloaded with projects. They were also not prepared to pay staff salaries or provide anything which B&NES Council should be providing anyway. The Partnership were determined not to waste any council money and have carefully researched the programmes offered. For example, swimming was one demand, but it was not possible to work out an equitable, cost effective and inclusive way to organise this. We have also endeavoured to use the money in such a way that it could work as seed money to start projects which will become self-supporting. We have also looked to fund CRB checks where necessary, and to make sure that all safeguarding measures were in place. Projects should be open to all, including those with a disability, no matter where they live in Radstock or Westfield.

The churches have revived non-evangelistic outreach work with a Friday night drop in craft, handiwork and coffee sessions, which are proving very popular this project is called Radical Street Space. RYP was happy to provide financial support which was used to increase their capacity through the employment of a paid worker for the café project in Radstock and to fund a short piece of work in Westfield to create opportunity for project development.

Additional activities have taken place at Radstock Youth Hub through the support of RYP. These include cooking sessions which reached 40 young people and spray art sessions which have created a body of art work which will be displayed to the community throughout the summer. Young people who took part in spray art project gave this feedback:

Male 16

I seen loads of graffiti that's rubbish but the instructor showed me how to do it proper. It looks really cool.

Male 14

Never tried it before it was fun.

Most notably RYP funded a residential education course which enabled the most vulnerable members of the Hub to go for a residential weekend. For most this was the only holiday they had that year and gave them a chance to experience something they would most probably not have experienced otherwise. Some of the feedback about their experiences was:

Female 15

It has been amazing I would never of been able to try these things without the club. I was so scared trying to get up the pole on the death slide but the staff and other young people cheered me on and I did it.

Female 17

I did crate stacking and got so high that loads of instructors told me how good I was.

It may appear below as disproportionately expensive, but this is because of extra staffing needed to support a disabled girl, and two teenagers on the autistic spectrum. It cost £75 per head, approximately.

This current financial year Radstock Youth Hub has made contact with 150 young people between 13-19, which is already 43 above target. In the age range of 11-19 there have been 170 contacts. RYP and the youth workers feel that the 'drop in ' element is important, but young people are charged a small amount per session. This is a considerable increase on 2006-7, when the then cabinet member claimed only 64 young people used the service. The increase is undoubtedly due to the programmes being well-prepared, fun, and what the young people themselves want.

Survey of young people in the Radstock-Westfield area.

After our experience with the night café it seemed essential (and common sense anyway) to make sure that we knew what young people really wanted, and to make sure it covered more than the young people already in contact. There was a pilot questionnaire devised by a professional, Graham Baker, and the young people at the Youth Hub which was then revised by them. For the Final Report the 220 respondents representing 118 returned questionnaires and responses from focus groups. Then there were a further 150 school surveys received but Graham Baker had filtered out those from children not resident in the area. One possible distorting factor was the gender breakdown 38%: 62% boys/girls. He re-analysed the data presented previously. Breakdown by age revealed what was already known, that 14/15 year olds drop out of organised activities such as scouts and guides. On the other hand, newcomers were getting involved. Reasons for not engaging in existing activities were cost +transport problems + distance from central Radstock. Significantly only 9.5% of boys compared with 26% girls visited leisure or sports centres.

A number of issues raised are matters for B&NES rather than the Partnership.

Bad news:

71.2% feel unsafe in certain areas of Radstock. 66% area worried about going out after dark. 84% of girls said they avoided going out alone to engage in activities. There was a great deal of information available now about where and why they felt unsafe – badly lit alleyways, lack of pavements etc. One Clandowner is never allowed out alone because Clandown is so dangerous. More girls than boys report difficulties with transport.

Good News:

68.9% of respondents want to be involved in activities.

In analysing the responses as to what sort of activities they wanted, the question was the extent to which students are already doing what they want, and how much they wanted to try new activities.

Most popular activities. This was fairly clear, but there were issues about delivery. Probably they could be grouped together:

Photography, film nights and street art.

Trampolining, swimming, archery, free running and football.

Camping and residential courses, climbing and kayaking.

Cooking and baby-sitting.

The full report is attached to this report.

Expenditure - see final sheet

Conclusion.

Firstly, Radstock Youth Partnership have endeavoured to put the young people first, listen to them and deliver programmed, accredited fun activities that have been welcome by our young people. Some enabled young people to gain awards for their CVs, and all activities would appear to have enhanced their self-esteem, physical fitness and creativity. A range of venues have

been used, or are being used, including Westfield Methodist Church, Radstock Methodist Church, Radstock Baptist Church, the church tea rooms, Writhlington School, Radstock Youth Hub and activity centres away from Radstock for a selected group who lacked exposure to experiences outside home and school.

Secondly, the members of the Partnership have gained some very beneficial knowledge of young people and their problems. After a long quest examining different options, they remain convinced youth work must centre around qualified Youth workers and trained CRB checked volunteers. It must remain open to all young people expressing a need, and wanting to improve their social skills.

Thirdly, we are so convinced of the merits of the programme that we want to enable the existing projects to progress and self-seed, and will do everything possible to ensure it is continued.

Fourthly, a key outcome for RYP is the strengthening of partnerships and networks in Radstock for providers of youth work, young people and representatives of local group who are interested in supporting youth work. This has resulted in increased opportunity for young people and greater sharing of skills and resources.

If Radstock is to remain as a sustainable, close-knit community rather than a commuter dormitory or a retirement home, its young people must be enabled to reach their full potential in Radstock, while being prepared for the wider world. This has become even more important as many young people were dependent on EMA for continuing their education, and may be badly hit by the introduction of 'universal credit.' RYP hope that the Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel will do all they can to support this endeavour.

Brian Perrett (Chair: Radstock Residents' Association)

Eleanor Jackson (Ward Councillor and Secretary of Radstock in Bloom)

Revd Andrew Pottage (Radstock, Westfield and Writhlington Methodist Churches)

Revd Andrew Stammers (Radstock Baptist Church)

Sarah Westell (Chair: RYP, Haydon Residents.)

With Sam Plummer, Senior Youth Worker, Radstock Youth Hub.

