

# GALLERY YOUTH: ADDRESSING RURAL CRIME THROUGH YOUTH WORK

Case study of a Clinks member in the North East

November 2014



# Clinks Case study – Gallery Youth

## Addressing rural crime through youth work

This case study focuses on the work of Gallery Youth, an organisation located in rural Northumberland in the North East of England and the role that it plays in reducing local crime and disorder and improving community cohesion. Gallery Youth provides both a service open to all young people in the locality of Alnwick, and also targeted support, in response to particular issues or needs.

Issues covered in this case study include:

- Anti-social behaviour
- Working with rural communities
- Inter-generational community cohesion

## Introduction

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Gallery Youth is a small charity based in Alnwick, Northumberland that provides services for people aged between 13 and 25 years. Gallery Youth was created in 1996 in response to a lack of activities and resources for young people in the local area and a high need.

This case study concerns the problem of anti social behaviour affecting the local market town and the effective response of Gallery Youth. Their work resulted in both a drastic reduction in reports and incidents of anti social behaviour, and increased community cohesion as a result of improved relations between young and older people in the town.



## About Gallery Youth

Gallery Youth is a small charity based in Alnwick in Northumberland that provides services for people between 13 and 25 years. They were created in 1996 in response to a lack of activities and resources for young people in the local area and a high need. They now have three full time staff and deliver a number of well used services. These include:

- Drop-in sessions that provide a safe environment where young people can access support or meet others
- Youth outreach both in the town centre and in other villages in Northumberland
- Supported accommodation for young people who have been homeless, or are in housing need
- Floating support for those living on their own for the first time
- Job club and other services, such as C Card (sexual health).

One of their key objectives is to encourage young people who 'hang around the town centre' to use Gallery Youth as a meeting place and to engage in positive activities. In 2013/14, nearly 200 individuals used their services, including 50 that used the project for housing related support and advice. At their drop-in, there were 1,500 substantive contacts between a youth worker and young people. The following figure presents the areas where support was provided.

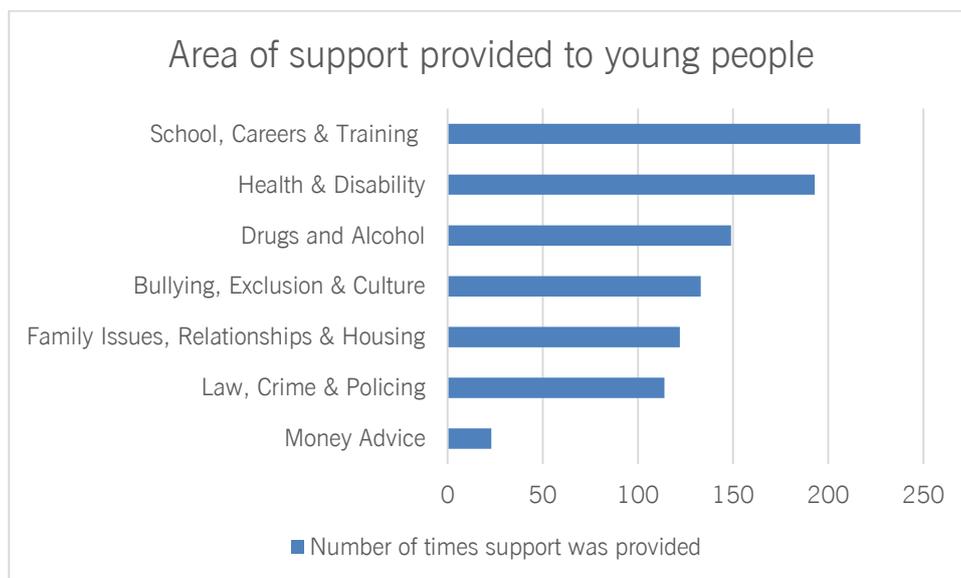


Figure 1

Gallery Youth believes that young people should be offered services and experiences that are safe and supportive which make them feel good about themselves and valued by their community. The work they do contributes to young people being supported, listened to and empowered, enabling them to build on confidence, self esteem and have a more informed transition to adulthood.

Young people who are empowered acquire confidence and self esteem, develop a social conscience, understand the impact of their actions on others, feel they have a voice and influence, and do not feel judged. They have also developed important life skills, such as planning, budgeting, communicating, working together within a group, and thinking about positive relationships. As a result they begin, and continue, to

make informed and positive life choices. This ensures that young people achieve in education and employment, stay safe and healthy, and make a positive contribution to society.

Gallery Youth's vision is that all young people in Alnwick will be valued by the society in which they live, work and play. Young people from Alnwick who are valued by society are much more likely to support the economic prosperity of the town and contribute to local communities being safe, secure and connected.



## The issue

Alnwick is a traditional market town in the North East of England with a population of around 20,000 people, serving a large rural community, involved in either farming or tourism. Although on the surface it is quite a prosperous town, there are pockets of local deprivation and poverty, particularly associated with former council estates. Many of the town's young people move away from the town into further education, university and employment. Those who are not employed by family businesses rely on part-time or short-term contracts with local businesses or they struggle to find work.

There are limited options for young people, who can find themselves excluded from meaningful employment and, due to rural isolation, have little chance of escape. Young people can also be excluded from local housing markets, as a result of the high house prices, driven up by people from outside the area buying holiday or retirement homes. Social housing is often the only option, on estates where they grew up. With few and limited choices, young people may find temporary relief through alcohol and/or substance use, with the risks of abuse and dependence. This substance misuse, homelessness and anti-social behaviour can all be factors that impact on the lives of young people growing up in the area, particularly in those from deprived neighbourhoods with limited options.

"I left Alnwick when I was 17 to go to college in York ... but, that didn't work out and I came back to find myself classed as 'intentionally' homeless by the council ... as I didn't get on with my parents and couldn't stay with them. I slept on people's floors for six months and felt like a scruff ... living out of other people's cupboards. I was really low and started drinking ... I couldn't get any regular work, or benefits cos' I always had to move about. I was offered a flat through the youth project and started to pull myself round after a few months."

## Rural areas, crime and young people

Rural areas, which include remote and isolated settlements, individual farms, villages, coastal communities, former coal mining areas and market towns, tend to share similar characteristics:

- Small and close knit communities
- Small scale local economies and rural poverty, often hidden beneath an impression of prosperity
- Geographical isolation and limited access to services, associated with slow rates of social change and limited external influence
- Traditions of mutual help and self-reliance, with some suspicion of strangers<sup>1</sup>.

Although crime in rural areas tends to be slightly lower in comparison with more urban locations, the crime types experienced are similar, with equally damaging effects; acquisitive crime, substance misuse, criminal damage, violent crime, sex offences and anti-social behaviour.

A particular issue in rural market towns can be anti social behaviour associated with youth disorder, alcohol consumption, boredom and a lack of available resources. In Alnwick, anti social behaviour makes up 60% of the locality's annual crime statistics<sup>2</sup>. At an Alnwick Local Multi Agency Partnership Strategy meeting (LMAPS - a local community safety group) in early 2013, they identified a particular issue with youth disorder and anti-social behaviour in and around the local bus station in the town centre. It was an already run down bus station and was now being used by groups of young people creating public disturbances and making it a 'no-go' area.

There were specific concerns about a core group of 12 individuals, some of whom had Anti Social Behaviour Orders. Gallery Youth, who are part of the LMAPS meeting, and because of their previous experience of diversionary work with young people in the town centre, were asked to intervene.



<sup>1</sup> <http://tna.europarchive.org/20100413151441/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.police.uk/northumbria/FG/>

## The anti social behaviour project

With funding from Alwick Town Council and the LMAPS group, Gallery Youth carried out targeted outreach with those young people in the bus station and asked them what they would like to be involved with. The young people had said that the bus station was an ugly and unwelcoming place and it did not seem as if anyone cared about what happened to it. It was only good for hanging about in and vandalising. The young people decided that they would like to be involved with making it a better place; one that was more welcoming and less likely to experience criminal damage. As a result of this engagement and consultation, Gallery Youth began participatory art activity with the young people and a local artist.

Over the summer of 2013, Gallery Youth, a group of young people and a local artist, designed and painted six 8 x 4ft boards with images that reflected life in Alwick. The involvement and participation from the young people was central to the success of the project and the boards were produced by the end of summer. In November 2013, the boards were unveiled and installed at the bus station at a launch attended by the Duchess of Northumberland and the local and regional press. The young people involved were congratulated for their involvement and participation and they received much praise from local residents. A set of postcards has been produced of the art work and these are on sale in the town to raise the profile of Gallery Youth and promote a more positive image of young people.

“The respect was great .... it gave us the chance to show the adults what we can do and show young people in a positive way ... as we're not usually involved in anything else in the town”



## The impact and outcomes

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The impact of the project has been considerable, both on levels of crime in the town centre and on the lives of the young people.

As a consequence of their recent work focusing on the bus station, reports of anti social behaviour fell by over half: in November 2012 there were 92 reports of anti social behaviour in Alnwick, in November 2013, when the artwork was installed at the bus station, there were 40 reports of anti social behaviour. The artwork remains at the bus station and the bus station has not been vandalised or damaged since.

Through their own evaluations with the young people involved in the project, they found the project had a series of outcomes including:

- **Increased confidence and self-esteem:** young people felt more confident and positive about themselves and their position in the community. The artwork showed positive images and reflected a positive approach in relation to the involvement of young people in the local community. The young people received significant benefit from the positive publicity and the fact that their artwork is displayed in the town.
- **Promoted citizenship and responsibility:** the young people felt more receptive about getting involved in other community activities. Before the project, the young people would never have considered becoming involved in a community activity, but now, after this positive experience, they would. The young people also felt that by being involved in making the town centre more attractive, they were more likely to feel responsible for its upkeep and protection from damage.
- **Increased community cohesion:** the young people felt that the project brought the community closer together, resulting in mutual respect. The project showed other residents that young people can and do make a positive contribution. This, they felt, made particularly older residents less likely to feel threatened by groups of young people in the area.



## Conclusion

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The work of Gallery Youth in response to anti-social behaviour has been recognised as an example of best practice at a national level. For example, the Commission for Rural Communities in a review of best practice<sup>3</sup> in England reported that a Gallery Youth initiative *“is an excellent example of a successful response to the universal problem of young people hanging around a town centre when there is nothing else to do.”*

There is evidence that Gallery Youth’s other work, aside from providing social welfare support for young people, also has an impact on local crime and disorder. For example, through their youth homelessness provision they provide stability and support for young people who often have alcohol and substance misuse problems; and their work and support on healthy relationships, provided particularly to girls and young women, has supported young people to exit situations of sexual exploitation.

*“It’s good not to be chased out of the market square, and show people what young people can do.”*

A key element to their work is that they do not differentiate between groups of young people, such as those involved in anti social behaviour, people who are homeless or those who are sexually exploited; all young people are treated the same and receive the same service. Their objective is quite simple; helping young people to be the best that they can be, for the benefit of both themselves and their local community.



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<sup>3</sup> Making Best Practice Stick, 2006. HM Government.

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To find out more about Gallery Youth, visit the website at [www.galleryyouthproject.org](http://www.galleryyouthproject.org)



This case study has been prepared by Barefoot Research and Evaluation. For more information see [www.barefootresearch.org.uk](http://www.barefootresearch.org.uk)



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