

National Community Conference
Community Engagement and Action around Alcohol Issues
8 December 2009



Presentation by:
Blackburn P7 Community Action Group

Rachel Dodd, Bathgate Academy
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Assisted by
Alison Kerr, Chairperson, Blackburn Community Council
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ALISON KERR

Introduction

I would like to begin by giving you a brief background of the Primary 7 Conference. The idea grew from a discussion that Tricia and I had, following a project steering group meeting, about how we could engage with the children in the community and promote inter school workings. We decided that we should arrange for each of the three primary schools in Blackburn to send two representatives from their primary 7 classes to meet and discuss how we could take this idea forward. From this meeting the Primary 7 Community Action Group was formed. The Primary 7 reps decided that they would like to organise a Primary 7 Conference and I was extremely fortunate when Tricia asked me to work with them to facilitate this event.

It was without a doubt the most meaningful community topic that I have had the pleasure to have been involved with.

Working with the Primary 7 Reps was extremely rewarding and on occasion opened my eyes as to the thoughts of the young people living in our small community.

It was a delight to watch their enthusiasm, commitment and dedication and to be part of the delivery on the day.

The Conference was held on 26th February 2009 and it was attended by 55 Primary 7 pupils and 30 invited adult guests from various services within West Lothian Council, key partner agencies and representatives from Community Groups.

The focus of the day was on the children of our community who were given an opportunity to voice their opinions about what they thought it was like to live in Blackburn.

This event was unique as it was the first Primary 7 Conference to be held in Blackburn and indeed the first to be held in West Lothian.

It was a tremendous success and achieved its aims by highlighting the concerns and the aspirations of our children by bringing together the young people of our community.

I would now like to hand over to three of last years Primary 7 class reps with us today, Rachel Dodd, Tammy Keenan and Jamie McBeth.

JAMIE McBETH

A brief background of the formation of Primary 7 Community Action Group;

Our schools, Blackburn, Murrayfield and Our lady of Lourdes Primary's, were asked to each send two class representatives from our Primary 7 classes along to a meeting to discuss how we could encourage our schools to work together and how we could improve our community.

We were chosen by our classmates and were happy to be their voice and to take information back. This was a great opportunity for our three schools to work together.

The class reps were

- Myself (Jamie Mc Beth) and Kiera McIndoe from Murrayfield Primary,
- Tammy Keenan and Katie Allan from Our Lady of Lourdes Primary
- Rachel Dodd and Adam McLean from Blackburn Primary.

The Primary 7 Representatives agreed that we would need to ask the views of our classmates and that we would need someone to help us do this. Alison Kerr joined us and acted as a guide as she had knowledge of who we should contact to take forward our ideas.

RACHEL DODD

We decided to begin by asking all Primary 7 pupils 3 questions, which we agreed would be short and direct. They were;

- What they liked about Blackburn.
- What they didn't like about Blackburn.
- What we could do to make Blackburn a better place to live.

We surveyed the views of our classmates and collected the information received in their responses. We wanted to arrange for all the Primary 7 pupils to hear these responses and discuss them further and it was then that we decided to organise a Primary 7 Conference to give all Primary 7's an opportunity to voice their views and share this information. We also decided to invite adults along to listen to the issues raised.

The P7 reps then became the Primary 7 Community Action Group and we worked towards organising the first Primary 7 Conference ever to be held in Blackburn. We met regularly for several weeks and the end result was our conference which was held on 26th February 2009.

TAMMY KEENAN

The invite list was drawn up by asking different services and partners that worked and volunteered within Blackburn, who we considered played an important part in our community life and who could help us to address our concerns. We invited representatives from

- Lothian and Borders Police
- West Lothian Council
- various Community Groups
- Head Teachers and Parent Councils
- Local Councillors and MSP's
- Education
- the Churches
- School Crossing Patrol Man

The programme for the day was

- **Ice Breaker session 1** – all pupils were given a numbered badge and were asked to sit at the table with the same number, this was to divide us into groups to make sure that we were along with pupils from other schools. We then asked unsuspecting adults from the audience to join the groups; this was to introduce ourselves to each other. The groups remained the same throughout the event.
- **Survey results and similarities of responses** – We will now show this on our DVD from the Conference.

P7 CONFERENCE DVD SHOWN OUTLINING THE SURVEY RESULTS PRESENTED BY THE SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES

The full conference report can viewed at <http://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/blackburn/>

ALISON KERR

Similarities from survey results from each school;

The comparisons of the results highlight very similar comments; as responses showed that our children mostly didn't like the same things in Blackburn these being vandalism, graffiti, litter, lack of bins, no place for young people to hang about, not enough for them to do, people drinking alcohol in the streets, people hanging about in gangs and shops selling alcohol to under aged children.

Their responses also showed that most of our children liked the same things in Blackburn, the football pitches; the Community Centre, the Library and most of them said that Blackburn has very good schools, very nice people and a great community spirit.

When asked what they liked about Blackburn some replied “the Old Folks Home and the Homeless flats to protect people”.

When asked what could be done to improve things in Blackburn some replied “a food kitchen for the homeless people”.

These responses were given at a time when pupils were being asked what could be done for them to help make Blackburn a better place to live in, they clearly show the type of caring, thoughtful and unselfish young people that we in Blackburn are privileged to have living in our community.

One response received from the survey was a way to improve things would be to encourage inter school working; the success of the Primary 7 Conference was an excellent example of this.

To ensure that the delegates and the guests found the conference to be of benefit they were each asked to complete an evaluation of the event by asking them what they thought of the conference, which part they enjoyed the most, if there was anything that they would like to see different or included next year and if they thought that the conference helped to raise a community awareness. The evaluation questions were the same for the children and the adults.

55 pupils completed these and again the comments received were similar. The majority of our Primary 7 pupils said that they really enjoyed everything about the conference as it gave them an opportunity to speak about Blackburn and listen to other people’s opinions because it was important to discuss what they could do to help the community. All agreed that it helped to raise community awareness.

16 adults completed an evaluation of the conference and all agreed that they thoroughly enjoyed the event. One comments was that it was very well organised and that it was an inspirational event for the whole community, the wide ranging involvement from so many partners provided a showcase for all the good work going on in Blackburn at a community level.

To conclude I would like to add that to engage with children and actively seek their involvement in community planning is something to be embraced by all of us here today for the future of all our communities.

JAMIE McBETH

The programme continued with;

- Community Police Officer, PC Howie, giving a talk on how to keep safe.
- West Lothian Council's Neighbourhood Environmental Team along with our Environmental Wardens gave an overview of their service.
- Each of the three schools gave a presentation on their most recent class projects;
Our Lady of Lourdes – America
Blackburn Primary – The Olympics
Murrayfield Primary - World War Two and Anne Frank's Diary.
- Ice Breaker session 2 – groups discussed what they had learned from the day, and prepared questions for the invited guests.
- Feedback sessions from the 7 groups and a very interesting question and answer session with the guests.

The pupils made suggestions on what could be done to make Blackburn a better place to live.

Some of the concerns that we had were that there was too much litter and broken glass, and we didn't like all the graffiti.

Suggestions to make Blackburn a better place to live included that we would like modern play parks and painted murals.

A huge concern that Primary 7 pupils had was the underage drinking that we often witnessed and how it affected us and the community in general.

RACHEL DODD

These suggestions gave us guidance and we began to focus on them.

In the few months since the Primary 7 Conference we have achieved the following.

- **Community Clean Up;** Approximately 50 pupils from each of the three schools, Blackburn Primary, Murrayfield Primary and Our Lady of Lourdes Primary, took part in this along with their teachers and members of the community. They cleared several bags of litter from an area in the village. Equipment was supplied by West Lothian Council's Environmental Enforcement Wardens who assisted the children on the day. The Community Clean up also featured in the Keep Scotland Beautiful campaign. Alison Kerr arranged for West Lothian Council's Neighbourhood

Environmental Team to join the children to give a demonstration on how graffiti was removed using specialised equipment whilst advising us all of the cost to do so.

- **Community Notice Board;** The notice board was put up inside our shopping centre and was supplied and fitted by West Lothian Council's Property Services department. The notice board has proved to be a huge success and arrangements are in place to supply a second notice board along with a plaque to highlight that they were a suggestion from the Primary 7 pupils.
- **Painted Mural;** Responses showed a desire to have a graffiti wall or a painted mural to brighten Blackburn up, following this suggestion an application has been submitted to Grassroots Public Arts Grants for funding to provide a painted mural. The intention was to show in art form what we would like to do to make Blackburn a better place to live, however the design and the location would be determined through further consultations with the school children.

TAMMY KEENAN

- **Underage and Agent Purchase Project;** this was developed by one of Community Action ~ Blackburn's co-investigative groups working in partnership with the Lothian and Border's Police, West Lothian's Youth Action Project, Local Licensing Forum, Licensing Standards Officer and representation from all local license holders. Underage drinking and the affects that it can have, as we have already stated, was a huge concern for our Primary 7 children. A school's poster competition was arranged and the pupils were asked to design a poster that would be used to launch this local initiative. The winning poster was a combination from a winner from each of the three schools where a part of each was used in the finished poster with the initiative being appropriately named "Can't Tell Don't Sell". Two of the winners are here with us today, Jamie McBeth and Rachel Dodd. I was involved in keeping Charlie and the other two judges, Councillor Beurskens and PC Emery, right on the day of the judging. Charlie asked me if they could combine sections from different posters into the one they would use for the initiative. I told him that would be ok so long as they still picked a winner from each school
- **King George V Park;** to modernise our play parks a request for realignment of West Lothian Council's Capital Programme budget for play parks was made. The Council was asked to bring forward their budget from 2013 /14 to 2010 /11. This request was successful and £25,000 is being realigned, this will allow an application to be made to LEADER Funding for match funds to begin the work at the start of the next financial year.

As you are aware there was a DVD made from our conference and I would like to add that this led to another opportunity for the three schools to meet.

We arranged for a showing of the DVD and sent invitations to all those who attended the event and we asked parents of all primary 7 children to come along and listen to the responses from their children.

At the showing we awarded our very own Blackburn Oscars and they were warmly received by the nominees.

JAMIE McBETH

What's Next?

We really enjoyed being the School Reps and arranging the P7 conference. We are keen to see the work that we helped to start, continue but we didn't know how we could with us moving onto secondary school. Scott McKillop, our Locality Planning Officer, has asked us to help develop a youth forum within Blackburn which will allow us to continue in the decision making and action process of making Blackburn a better place to live.

What has this meant for me?

Jamie McBeth

Rachel Dodd

Tammy Keenan

TRICIA PATERSON

Conclusion

This is only the beginning. Thanks to these 3 pupils and all the P7s who have proved themselves to be responsible citizens by showing how much they care about their community and by actively working with others to take forward their ideas.

Our next step has already begun. It has been decided that we will work now with Primary 6 and 7 pupils. Our intention is to invite Peer educators into school. These are young people/teenagers who will talk to the younger pupils about their experiences of alcohol and other issues. We feel pupils will respond well and seek out answers to questions they may not ask their teachers or parents.

I am sure you enjoyed a younger point of view and will agree that these pupils, Blackburn's future, have been effective contributors to today's conference.

Rachel, Jamie and Tammy, I am very proud of you all today.

Please join me in showing your appreciation.