

The Thames Valley Partnership's Schools in Action Project

1993 - 2007

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THAMES VALLEY
PARTNERSHIP 
Working for safer communities

Introduction

The intention of this report is to inform our partners and schools about the next phase of our Young Citizens work and to recap on the achievements of the Schools in Action element of the programme in particular.



Badgers Hill Pupil Referral Unit Road Safety project

The Young Citizen's Programme of which Schools in Action forms a significant part aims to: -

- Promote citizenship and strengthen the contribution that young people can make to community safety in their schools and communities
- Encourage confidence and the development of personal responsibility to make young people less likely to become victims or perpetrators of crime
- Widen opportunities for young people and to develop imaginative ways of engaging disaffected and excluded young people e.g. through the creative arts and sport



Schools in Action – a short history

The Schools in Action programme was initiated by Lady Margaret Popplewell when she was High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire in 1993. She was also the first chair of trustees of Thames Valley Partnership. The original idea was to provide small grants to schools to kick-start crime prevention/community safety initiatives; projects would be student-led and would encourage the development of confidence and a sense of personal responsibility.

“Schools in Action gives a validity and status to important work outside the straightjacket of the national curriculum”. (Quote from a teacher).

It was also felt to be important to support the work by way of advice and recognition and to celebrate the young people’s achievements. **The High Sheriffs** of the 3 counties became ‘attached’ and contributed significantly to the project and each year have visited each school in their county to recognize the work of the students and schools and have nominated prizewinners. 13 years on and the High Sheriffs – new ones each year – have continued to support the work and many have indicated that the schools visits are among the highlights of their year in office.



Jenny Hopkirk, High Sheriff of Bucks 2005-06



Brigadier Nigel Mogg, High Sheriff of Oxon 2002-03

Pupils find the end of the rainbow

THE High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire, Richard Godber, officially opened a new sensory room for children with learning difficulties at Park School last week.

The Rainbow Talk Room, which has been designed as somewhere for students to sit down and relax in each other's company, was developed thanks to a grant of £500 from the Thames Valley Partnership.

Sue Moynehan, a teacher at the Aylesbury school, said: "The High Sheriff was there to officially open the room and to celebrate the achievement of the students.

"The room is called the Rainbow Talk Room, which was named by a student who said there is a rainbow on the other side of every cloud and there is a pot of gold at the end of each rainbow."



OFFICIAL OPENING: High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire, Richard Godber, with students from Park School in Aylesbury

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A quote from a High Sheriff: *“In my opinion it is very useful for High Sheriffs to have this handle to work with. For many it is the most interesting aspect and it may be the most beneficial.”*

Our work with special schools

Schools in Action has evolved over the years and in 2002 we decided to introduce an additional prize for special schools during the Queens Golden Jubilee year – the Jubilee Award. This award particularly encouraged special schools to take part and since then we have had a significant proportion of projects every year working with pupils with learning or behavioural problems and they have greatly enriched the programme.

“For us the money was important for allowing an activity that wouldn’t have otherwise happened with a needy and marginalized group” (quote from a special school teacher).

Below are 2 examples of special schools we have worked with – the Mabel Prichard School in Oxford and the Woodland Pupil Support Centre in High Wycombe.



Peter Bickmore, High Sheriff of Oxfordshire with students from Mabel Prichard school at the TRAX motor project



In October 2003 we had an independent **evaluation** of Schools in Action undertaken by Mark Dewhurst. Its main findings were that:

- It is clear that the programme works well for schools and is highly valued by them
- Schools in Action offers motivation and structure – there is a beginning a middle and an end and recognition of young people’s achievements
- There is a considerable administrative burden on the Partnership team
- It is difficult to reach the schools who need it most

The Young Citizens Celebration Event has been held annually since the inception of the programme. In earlier years it was held at our sponsor’s premises e.g. Unipart and Mars, in the early 2000s the River and Rowing Museum in Henley were our generous hosts and we enjoyed sunny days sitting by the river eating posh sandwiches! In 2004 and 2005 we enjoyed the more mundane but comfortable surroundings of Thame Football Club and most recently in the last 2 years Stratfield Brake in Kidlington has proved to be a very suitable and accessible venue.



Celebration Day
June 2007 at
Stratfield Brake



Patsy with the trophies at our 2005 event at Thame football club

Recognition

The scheme was recognized with an award in 2006 from the Oxfordshire Education Business Partnership and some of our participating schools have been successful in the National Crimebeat awards over the years.

The Future

A recent internal review of Schools in Action and subsequent discussions with our supporters has highlighted that both the project and the context have changed gradually and subtly in recent years. These changes have prompted us to ask questions about whether the current format achieves our objectives and provides the best added value. Specifically we see that:-

- Schools in Action projects have moved further away from the Thames Valley Partnership's key concerns, remit and objectives and whilst they still actively engage and involve pupils and thus promote citizenship and responsibility in a broad sense few now tackle a community safety theme.
- Our funding and support is not necessarily adding value because most of these initiatives would happen anyway – some as part of the Citizenship curriculum, others mainstreamed within the work of the School Council or, increasingly as part of the Environmental agenda.

- We have seen few really innovative ideas and in all but a very few projects we are rewarding competent delivery, rather than excellence.

In thinking about the future therefore :

- Both Thames Valley Partnership and Vodafone are keen to focus on those most at risk and to support those who have the fewest opportunities.
- Fewer resources or initiatives focus on hard to reach groups, those on the edge of education, employment or training and those who don't engage in mainstream opportunities.
- Thames Valley Partnership has recognised the importance of transition at an early stage (primary to secondary school) but is also keen to promote positive transition to adulthood and to address an unhelpful disconnection between youth justice to adult criminal justice systems.

We are still exploring the exact nature of what will be our more targeted approach to our Young Citizens work and we will be clear by the end of this year how we will take it forward.

In the meanwhile – and with regret – the existing Schools in Action project will cease in its current form as will the system for open bidding for annual grants. The new look Young Citizens work is likely to be set around certain themes and bids will be solicited rather than open. We will issue clear guidance through our website by the end of this calendar year.

It remains for the team at Thames Valley Partnership to thank all our stakeholders in Schools in Action over the last 14 years – particularly the schools – students and teachers - and the High Sheriffs of the three counties. It has proved to be an amazing project which has worked with hundreds of young people, all of whom have illustrated with exceptional commitment and enthusiasm, their growing citizenship skills and their ability to make positive contributions to each other, to their schools and to the wider community!

Patsy Townsend
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