

Time for the kids

Coventry Community Empowerment Network -
The Key To Our Success

Edgwick Sports Project started when Stuart and Elaine Parker chose to react positively to kids who put a football through the window of their house in Foleshill. Ten years later, it is still a success, because they work closely with other partners.

One Sunday afternoon ten years ago a ball came sailing through Stuart and Elaine's bathroom window. Some youngsters were playing in the road outside, but instead of getting angry with them, Stuart chose a different approach.

'I asked the kids why they didn't play in the park behind our house. It turned out they did play football there sometimes on Sundays, but only in a big group. But at other times they were frightened of the drugs, gangs and boozers. So they played in the street.'

Stuart asked them whether they would back him if he organised some football in the park. *'They said they would come along, as long as it wasn't run by parents!'* He promised to look into it and come back with an answer.

Stuart and Elaine were already members of the local Crime Action Group (see box on next page). One of the aims of this group was to reclaim Edgwick Park from drug users. At the next meeting the couple suggested the football idea, and the group was able to access funds from the Community Safety Team to start the project off.

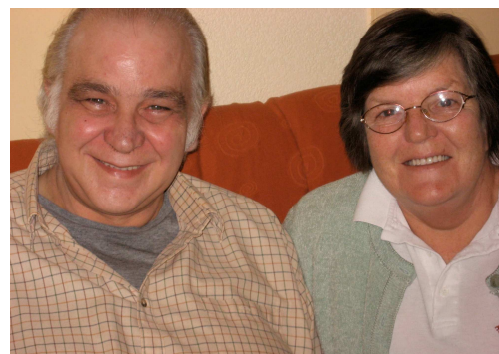
Ten years on, the Edgwick Sports Project is going strong, with football three times a week across several parks, and other sports also regularly played.

'Within the first six months we heard that the crime figures had dropped' comments Elaine. *'Now you can walk through the park; when we first started, it wasn't safe.'*

Some of the young people have gone on to train as referees themselves, and one is even doing a degree in sports science.

Working in partnership to make it happen

Stuart and Elaine continually emphasise the importance of working together with others. *'We wouldn't attempt to do it on our own. We've seen people try - a couple of weeks, and then it's packed up'*



How can I do something similar?

Elaine and Stuart say: *'talk to your local kids first, to see what they want. (Or if you're nervous about talking with the young people, approach the youth workers first). Then go and talk to the council, youth workers and police.'*

Safer Neighbourhood Groups

The Crime Action Group is now called 'Community Safety Action Group'. Also Safer Neighbourhood Groups now bring together local agencies and residents to discuss specific issues concerning crime and safety in an area. Contact your Neighbourhood Management Team to find out meeting details (see previous page).

A Coventry Community Empowerment Briefing

The project started off as part of the Crime Action Group. *'I worked with the community safety officer and we got youth services on board,'* explains Stuart. Youth workers walked the streets to invite young people along, and they still go out to youngsters in the area that are causing a problem. The kids now know that if they've got problems, they can go to the referees, or the youth workers, for help, for anything from being excluded from school to bullying.

'Then we persuaded Leisure Services at the council to let us use the park and put the lights on for us,' says Stuart. *'I got hold of the football authority and they told us that we could get part-time coaches.'*

The police are also involved and are often to be seen in the park, talking to the kids. *'The police can come in on their beat and talk to the kids. The kids used to call the police pigs; now they know them by their Christian names,'* says Stuart.

It's very clear that Elaine and Stuart also view the young people as a key part of this partnership. *'We don't say, "this is what we're doing, join us"; we say, "what are you interested in?"'* explains Elaine. *'Eventually we want to hand the whole project over to them, to run it themselves with the partners and ourselves in the background.'*

The team holds meetings every 3 months with all the partners. If there's a problem we discuss how to deal with it. *'And we fill out funding forms thoroughly, so everyone has an input into the form,'* explains Stuart.

What is the key to working in partnership?

Elaine saw a saying once: "Community must respect the professionals and professionals must respect the community." *'The community has to realise that professionals like youth workers and leisure services have to work to a set of rules and guidelines,'* she says. *'We have to work with them because they have a knowledge of health and safety, maintenance, sport etc. But we also need residents and young people because they live in the area.'*

Residents can't say, "we want, you do". What we say is, "we would like, can you do?". If the council says no, we ask them to tell us why. Then we feed this back to the community.'

Elaine concludes: *'We're not saying everything's 100 per cent or ever will be, but it's a long way from what it was 10 years ago. You have to have the partnership. It won't work without it.'*

The views expressed in this article are those of the people interviewed, and not necessarily those of Coventry Community Empowerment Network

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Read an in-depth account of the project at www.renewal.net, (type 'Edgwick Sports Project' into the search box).