

People's Place

People's Place in Stoke Aldermoor is well known as a safe place where people can go for advice. By recognising that everyone is valuable, the centre is working together with young people, local residents and other agencies to help break down barriers and plan for a successful future.



Coventry Community Empowerment Network -
The Key To Our Success

Local people in Stoke Aldermoor know that People's Place is a *safe* place to go. They operate an advisory service for youngsters from the age of 8 to 24, and work with a network of other agencies to give the best possible guidance. A health visitor and a nurse attend regularly to talk about general health and sexual health issues. Counselling is offered on a one to one basis covering all sorts of issues including bullying. The Centre works with SHADOW to offer support to people who have experienced sexual abuse and their families and friends.



Safe Haven

Jim Quinn, who manages the centre, said that an agreement had been made with local police that officers do not cross the threshold uninvited. However, this does not mean that the premises can be used as a hideaway. If someone has a warrant against them or they are in trouble, People's Place will offer legal advice, welfare rights and debt advice. There is also an advocacy service helping with County Court and Social Security tribunals.

There are a lot of excluded youngsters in the neighbourhood. Rather than spending time on the streets, the youngsters are welcome at the Centre. They can use the computers, the DJ and music equipment and play pool, but there is a trade off: schoolwork must also be done. People's Place has accreditation with Ofsted, so although the place is a *safe haven*, it is not *heaven*. The Home Office has used People's Place as an example of how similar organisations can work in communities; Jim wants to ensure that this project continues to be an example of 'best practice' that other organisations can emulate it.

Young people taking responsibility

'It's very important to involve young people in the 'governance' of People's Place. Although staff have set some guidelines, the young people who use the

The SHADOW Project

The SHADOW (Sexual Health and Drugs Outreach Work) project focuses on education and prevention work with young people in the fields of Sex and Relationship Education (SRE), sexual health, teenage pregnancy, drugs, smoking and healthy lifestyles.

The Hub

The Hub group, now known as the LIFE group, is a group of local residents working together to develop a new community hub building.

They are working towards being a formal group that can apply for funding to refurbish the old infant school.

A Coventry Community Empowerment Briefing

centre have also written some rules on how it should be used. It gives them ownership of the project,' says Jim.

Stoke Aldermoor is undergoing massive regeneration. Traditionally, young people are not involved in shaping their neighbourhood, but People's Place has become part of the 'hub', a project to for a new community building to be built as part of the regeneration. Young people can now feed in their views about the future of Stoke Aldermoor, and rather than being seen as separate from other groups and agencies in the area, they are now an integral part. There is going to be a new community building in the heart of the neighbourhood and People's Place hopes to take up some space in it. They will have a separate entrance, but will be very much part of the 'hub'.

Managing for the future

One of the main problems for the project is funding. The Youth Service rent some space at the centre which helps to keep the project going, but with the forming of a new management committee, Jim hopes that the future will be more stable. Help has come from many sources, but Michelle Price, the manager of the Stoke Aldermoor Renewal Project, has been a real support. She now sits on the management committee and is committed to the ongoing sustainability and success of People's Place, including seeing it through the process of attaining charitable status. Other members of the committee include representatives from the community, the police, the youth service and young people.

Jim wants to make sure that management committee members are fully equipped to undertake their responsibilities and is looking to put on a training programme to include 'fundraising'. *'If one or two people are trained to specialise in this area, the project will reap the benefits and people will be learning new skills,' he says.*

Working together

Jim has learned that projects like People's Place cannot work in isolation; working with partners and other agencies, like the police, youth services and the young people themselves is essential, and ensures the best possible service. His one piece of advice for working with communities and in particular young people is 'Total Tolerance'. *'People's Place never gives up on a youngster. If bad behaviour continues, then People's Place is doing something wrong. Generally, when the problem is bottomed out, bad behaviour stops'.* And Jim's final quote – 'Everyone is valuable'.

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