

## Event report

**Event title:** Community Cohesion Conference  
**Date:** Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2008  
**Time:** 9.30 a.m. to 2.45 p.m.  
**Location:** Rednock School, Dursley  
**Staff:** Ann Wheeler, Jane McKerron  
**Partners:** Rednock School, Vale Vision, Dursley Town Council, Cam Parish Council, Neighbourhood Wardens, Stroud District Council, representatives of children and young people from Cam & Dursley

**Aim of event:** As part of the Schools Extended Services initiative, Rednock School hosted an event which brought together a representative group of school pupils with a range of agencies and community based organisations working within and for the community of Cam and Dursley.

This conference provided the following:

- 1) An opportunity for the children and young people to learn about what these organisations and agencies offer to local residents in terms of services, activities and support
- 2) An opportunity for the organisations and agencies to listen to this group of young people and understand what they feel and think about living in this area, how they regard and take advantage of the facilities that are available
- 3) An opportunity for the young people to consider and share what additional facilities they might like in the area – or what they might want to see improved
- 4) An opportunity for the organisations and agencies to learn from each other, and about each other – in order to improve the quality, frequency of activities, and work more closely together to ensure cost effective service delivery

**Preparation:** Letter and agenda was sent to all organisation representatives explaining the programme for the day, requesting a 10 minute presentation from each organisation. The event was held in the media suite at Rednock School.

**Format:** The event was opened by David Alexander, Head Teacher of Rednock School who welcomed the pupils and guests to this event. There were approximately 17 representatives from local organisations who introduced themselves to the overall group of pupils.

The first speakers were Geoff Wheeler of Vale Vision, and Rosie Jones, 6<sup>th</sup> Form pupil at Rednock School, who briefly outlined the principles of Community Cohesion – respecting individuals' rights, and diversity.

The pupils were on tables of 10 (6 tables in all, totalling 60 pupils) and each organisation was assigned to a particular table. We provided a presentation at the table to that group of 10 pupils,

and this was followed by 50 minutes discussion. This exercise was repeated after the pupils moved around affording us the opportunity to talk at length with 20 young people. Our presentation covered the work of GL11 and TLC within the community, and the vital role that volunteers play in help us to provide community services, but also in helping volunteers themselves through improved skills and knowledge, increased levels of confidence, reduced sense of isolation, and becoming actively involved in their local community. These volunteers are of all ages, and we promoted the importance of young people becoming involved and understanding how their contribution can make a difference at a personal level, in engaging with other young people who are new to the area for example, and encouraging them to have a say and help influence what happens in their local area.

Each group then asked 2 questions, and these formed the basis of a feedback session for collective discussion after lunch.

The feedback session was led by Matt McCarthy of Rednock School and this wide group discussion brought out further interesting views and comments all of which have been recorded and will form the basis of a report.

**Evaluation:** This was a long session for the pupils some of whom were from Year 8, however the active contribution and questioning by pupils showed an impressive level of maturity and interest in what is happening in their communities.

In the presentation by GL11, Ann explored the meaning of a 'community' and the word 'cohesion'; she talked about the natural assumption that a community is based upon locality, however she discussed with the pupils factors contributing to 'communities of interest' – isolation, lack of self confidence, BME groups, mental health issues.

We also considered the word cohesion and its dictionary definition of "tendency to unite". GL11 is committed to delivery services, training and activities which all contribute to 'uniting' and bringing together residents from the Cam and Dursley area, and encouraging volunteer involvement.

**Outcome:** Representatives from local groups/organisations gained much information from the youth which can contribute to the provision of future facilities and services. The areas of particular concern related to:

Street drinking – looking at a ban of street drinking (is it fair to ban everyone because a minority cause a problem?)

Litter – more bins needed, peer pressure not to drop litter (asking friends who litter to pick it up)

Public Transport – cheaper bus fares needed

Youth Club and other facilities – ensuring money is used for what young people actually want, rather than what others think they want

How safe do you feel in Cam and Dursley – considered why people might feel more safe in one area than another.

A number of young people expressed a willingness to attend local Police Community Safety team meetings (held once every two months) which would enable their voice and concerns to be directly heard.

There was agreement that this exercise should be repeated, possibly annually, and that there is a clear responsibility upon the community groups and agencies to work more closely with each other, and to work with the youth. Understanding what makes a diverse community and how important it is for people new to the area to feel welcomed is essential to successful community cohesion and listening to, and working with, young people is key to this.

**Ann Wheeler**  
**Project Manager**

4.4.08