

Spotlight

focus on youth work in Wales

TOWN'S DRIFTING YOUNG PEOPLE GET SOMEWHERE TO GO



The young people of Aberdare have a place to call their own, thanks to a unique project which comes to fruition this month (November).

A brand new building in the Mid Glamorgan town centre gives them somewhere to go for recreation or to find guidance in case of problems - and the young people themselves have been involved in the project right from the start.

Thought to be the only recent purpose-built youth centre of its kind in Wales, it was conceived two and a half years ago when Mr Philip Arthur Davies, head of Blaengwawr Community Education Centre in Aberdare, happened to visit the town centre one evening.

He found more than 100 young people just hanging around aimlessly.

..we called a public meeting of young people to discuss their needs ... and were amazed when over 90 turned up..

They had nothing to do and were obviously at risk of getting into alcohol or drug abuse in an adult environment/ said Mr Davies. 'When we talked to them we found they were bored and depressed and had low self-esteem. They all said they wanted somewhere to go.'

Mr Davies and his colleagues determined that something should be done. First step was to call a public meeting of young people to discuss their needs. They expected only a handful to respond and were

amazed when about 90 young people turned up.

Then came the task of finding resources for the project - a search which came to involve the Prince of Wales. He became interested in the project when he talked to local youngsters in a cafe during a visit to the area.

Prince Charles has had regular progress reports and vital assistance, such as an architect's services, has been provided through his Business Partnership scheme. He also expressed support for the project to the Welsh Office, which eventually provided a capital grant of £170,000 plus £30,000 a year to fund the appointment of a full-time project manager and part-time assistants.

The £80,000 site in Canon Street was provided by the Welsh Development Agency. Mr Davies is full of praise for the 'tremendous' assistance of Cynon Valley Borough Council and of other sections of the community, including the Chamber of Trade and the 'caring' agencies.

But he stresses that it is the young people who have shaped the project. 'It is their 'property' and they have decided how it should be furnished and what activities they want there,' Mr Davies said. The decisions are taken by a young people's committee, chaired by 18-year-old Faron Jones, who is also vice-chairman to Mr Davies on the overall management committee.

Facilities at the centre include a non-alcoholic bar, called Chequers and furnished to give a pub 'feel', an information 'shop' and a counselling room. On the first floor youngsters will be able to play pool or table tennis and hold discos and concerts. Young people with disabilities will have a lift to take them up there.

The centre was due be opened around mid-November and its first manager appointed. One of his or her duties will be to plan for the future of the centre and establish alternative sources of funding for salaries, since the Welsh Office grant will taper off after four years.

Photo: The nearly completed Youth Centre in Canon Street, Aberdare, with Mr Philip Arthur Davies, chairman of the project management committee, and Gaynor Ryan, community education project worker, who has also been closely involved in the project.