

Solihull's Environment Champions

Co-Production and Big Society Road Show

29th March 2011

Alison Lush Neighbourhood Manager

- Ongoing problems with graffiti and litter in Solihull and issues of shrinking budgets to deal with them
- Launch of the Environment Champions in March 2007
 - 63 Champions initially registered through existing Neighbourhood Watch Scheme
- Initially sat with Environmental Health team - moved into Neighbourhood Management in August 2007
- Aims
 - ✘ Greater community involvement and ownership
 - ✘ Reduction in litter and graffiti by removing the broken window syndrome
 - ✘ Improved partnership working between public private and voluntary sector

- Project was received well - initial framework put in place including Health and Safety training for Champions after discussion about level needed
- Charter for Champions and affiliated groups put in place to set ground rules for membership.
- For eighteen months project was run by staff as part of existing duties or on part-time basis
- Success and potential of project was recognised by residents, Council members and partners. Funding sought from Council to develop initiative
- Nov 2008 saw first full time post approved with small capital budget attached- May 2009 Environment Champion Coordinator in post

Putting a framework in place

- Annual targets set for initiative including:
 - ✘ Recruitment of individual Champions
 - ✘ Recruitment of affiliated organisations
 - ✘ Number of projects completed
 - ✘ Establishing a robust reporting/monitoring system
 - ✘ Regular communications mechanism
 - ✘ Some of these targets are now part of the
 - ✘ division's monthly performance reports.

- Jan 2010 report taken to Cabinet establishing guideline for Champions including:
 - All Champions projects to be carried out with knowledge and support of ECC
 - Projects to have easy and obvious access for Champions
 - Projects will be identified as appropriate that bring some positive benefit to the community as a whole or to residents that cannot for physical or financial reasons carry out the project without some assistance.
 - Projects proposed or led by a political organisation cannot be supported by the ECC. Individual Champions engaged in these projects who are signed up to the initiative can make use of the tools generally leant out for this purpose, but cannot expect to receive organisational or promotional support from the Coordinator or other Neighbourhood staff

- Since the initiative has started engagement with the local community has quadrupled
- 273 individual champions working around the borough either on their own or on programmed projects
- 109 affiliated groups (January 2011)
 - 20 schools
 - 89 local businesses – many signing up to Corporate Social Responsibility Charter
- To date have completed over 100 projects borough wide which has led so far to an outcome saving of over £200,000

It also encourages Partnership working

Examples of Partners who have worked with the scheme include:

- ✘ Police
- ✘ Parish Councils and Ward members
- ✘ Charitable organisations eg Soroptomists
- ✘ Princes Trust
- ✘ Social Enterprises
- ✘ Residents groups
- ✘ Schools
- ✘ Private sector eg National Grid, Barclays, Greggs the Bakers and small local companies
- ✘ Partner contractors eg Ringway and Enterprise

What kind of work do Champions do?

- Litter picks
- Graffiti removal
- Putting up dog fouling signs
- Projects to brighten up neighbourhoods eg planting schemes, wall painting
- Conservation projects
- Large scale projects

Crabtree Hall

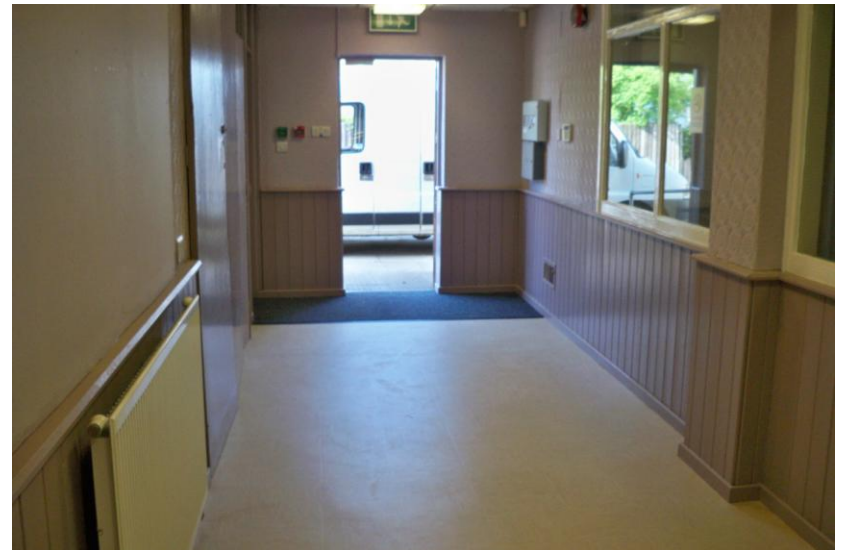
- Dilapidated community hall in an area with few local community resources
- No existing resources available to pay for cost of redecoration
- 49 individual Champions, young and old, came together from across the whole borough in March 2010 to redecorate the hall
- Private and public sector partners contributed
- Celebration tea party held with Mayor

- New heating was installed by Solihull Community Housing
- Paint donated by a Contractor to the Council
- New blinds sold at a reduced price by a local supplier
- Local flooring contractor installed new parquet flooring

In Action



Finished Hallway



Gardeners World at NEC June 2010

- Raised the profile of volunteering as an Environment Champion through a high profile projects – to engage and interest people.
- The Environment Champions worked with partners to help build the Garden which was based on ideas from local school children
- 110 volunteers came together to create the garden - theme 'Alice in Biodiversity Land'
- Many of the features were made out of recycled items from our borough



- Project involved 3 schools, our partner contractors, local suppliers and 2 social enterprises
- The Garden won a Silver medal and attracted a lot of public interest

How the scheme can help residents-supply effective equipment

Without Council Help



With Council Help



Some of the Environmental Outcomes

Before



After



Support for Co-production projects

- SWANN (Smiths Wood Area Neighbourhood Network) project in Smiths Wood - decorating unused shop for new Community group
- Kingshurst Parade - decorating shop for Community Arts project
- CAFÉ project in Fordbridge - support for environmental projects aimed at engaging the community
- Funding bids submitted and secured for equipment and facilities which will enable groups to run their own projects and gain training in the process eg SWANN Environmental Task Force

Next steps

- Create/encourage Super-Champions to help lead/supervise projects and recruit more Champs
- Continue to work with communities to encourage self-confidence and build capacity through project work
- Encourage groups to work together i.e. build links between Parish Councils, local schools and volunteers to co-ordinate a project
- Work with the Council's Employer Volunteer Support scheme
- Support Corporate Social Volunteering through Project Match scheme

What have we learned?

- Proper supervision and support is essential, especially with new groups. It ensures the welfare of the volunteers and supports a positive outcome. A project left badly done or unfinished can be off putting for all involved.
- Make sure in advance there are enough resources to support project eg materials, time etc
- Make use of any resources you can that are on offer to ensure the above happens, especially human resources!
- Have a clear recruitment framework and guidelines established and understood by all
- Good contacts, whether with agency partners or locally, are worth their weight in gold. Do favours and build goodwill!
- Publicise your successes and give people credit.

A quote from one of our Champions:

‘By supporting our residents locally on projects that are important to them is empowering them and the sense of community is being restored....you even make new friends!’