

Gordon Brown comes to visit Challenge in Leicester!

We have recently finished running the Challenge Programme in two schools in Leicester (Sir Jonathan North Community College and The Lancaster School) both of which were successful, and a good start to working in the city.

We are also now approaching the culmination of a three team event with New College. As you can see from the photo below, the project was visited by Gordon Brown, Hazel Blears and Patricia Hewitt & Keith Vaz! This visit was brought about following a meeting that Matt & Matt had with the Home Office last summer.

When they subsequently approached us to host a visit from a Cabinet Minister, we jumped at it. It was

then that they mentioned Gordon Brown, who was due to launch the 'young people volunteering initiative'.

The Challenge Programme fits perfectly into this idea of encouraging young people to become a part of their community through volunteering.

The visit took place on the 3rd March at Allextion Community Centre, where one of the teams from New College were painting a mural to brighten up the corridor. We were amazed how many people it took to arrange the visit! We had calls from the Treasury, the Home Office, the BBC, the Met Police, the local Police, the local press and last but not least, the national press as well. We were expecting 10-15 people. We ended up with more than 30!

However, the day went extremely



well. After joining the team in painting their mural, Gordon sat with the team and had a long discussion with them about volunteering. We made the local press the following day and the Politics Show on the BBC.

The young people on the project were very impressed that their project was deemed important enough for a visit from someone even they had heard of! *"It is really good that they came to see what we are doing. Everyone usually thinks that our school is really bad, but they haven't been to see us. This shows that we are doing really good stuff too"*.

Ryan Hancock 13.



Gordon Brown, Patricia Hewitt, Kate Wood, Ryan Hancock and Hazel Blears

The Team Advisor on the project Kate Wood, remarked on how inspired it made the team after the visit, "it's been a real boost to the team and they're determined to do a really good job, so that they can send the finished photos to show Gordon".

We've had a very good response to the information we recently sent out to other schools and therefore expect to have more confirmed projects very soon. As they say, watch this space!

You win some 😊, You lose some ☹️



As always in the topsy turvy, roller-coaster world of fundraising, we have mixed news regarding our fortunes this issue.

Firstly, let's get the bad news out the way! Unfortunately we finally heard last month that our three-year bid to the Big Lottery's Strategic Fund was turned down. This grant would have paid for a Challenge Programme Development Manager and the expansion of the programme to three cities.

Their decision letter stated *"the project is clearly based on considerable groundwork and has proved effective during the pilot phase. The application demonstrates a high level of planning and appears to offer good value for money. However, as the project is focused on supporting*

the delivery of the citizenship element of the National Curriculum, it is not deemed sufficiently additional to the obligations of statutory authorities and therefore is outside our funding policy"

After a couple of months of hard slog, and then a nine-month wait, this came as very disappointing news. As yet, we're not sure whether any new applications will fall foul of the same criteria, although a new outline proposal has now been made to their Reaching Communities Fund. We've more strongly argued the case as to why Challenge is 'additional' but we'll let you know how this goes.



Onto more cheery news (part one), I'm thrilled to say we were successful in receiving a £10,800 grant from the newly formed Russell Commission charity. This is currently enabling us to externally research the national potential for Challenge, as well

as internally research best practice in volunteering. (A huge thanks to everyone who recently returned the volunteer questionnaire). Our hope is that if we can impress the Commission with our findings, we'll be in a much stronger position to submit a large application in a few months time. As always, keep your fingers crossed!



Cheery news, (part two), is hot off the press, and currently embargoed! However, as

you'll hopefully see elsewhere in the newsletter, we've just had confirmation of a £150k bid to provide two Inspire Residentials per summer for the next three years. Officially, we can't really say anymore about the funding until after 11 April, other than "hooray", and we'll let you know more once we're in a position to!

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A GREAT BIG THANK YOU!

To Hester Sheardown, who raised an amazing £1,860 for FOCUS by running 26 miles in the New York Marathon last November. Well done Hester for having that much energy and dedication!



Improving Our Organisational Management

As part of an initiative being run by Leicestershire Cares, FOCUS has recently been partnered with De Montfort University under the Businesses Building Communities scheme. Through this partnership FOCUS will receive 100 hours of support from senior managers from the University, which will address strategic organisational development issues. An action plan for the scheme is currently being developed and staff from De Montfort's Student Support Services department have been working with us to identify areas of our Business Plan where support can be offered. The scheme will last for one year, but it is hoped that a longer-term partnership will be developed beyond that.



Director's Chair April 2006

We (and by 'we' I mean the voluntary sector, rather than my close friends and family and me) suddenly find ourselves bathing in the warmth of public interest and the friendly attention of some assorted politicians!

As the new leaders of two of our major political parties, along with the potential 'leader elect' of the Government jockey for position, it seems that aligning themselves with the voluntary sector and raising their profiles as caring, sharing and generally lovely people is the order of the day.

Whilst this is very nice for us at the moment, and at FOCUS we cannot deny the pleasure we all felt as one of our projects was visited by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, a Home Office Minister of State, the Secretary of State for Health, and the MP for Leicester East, it does raise questions for us about the nature of the voluntary sector's role in the future. Moreover, what will the future hold for the young people that those of us

involved in the voluntary youth sector aim to support?

It would appear that the major political parties are all very keen to encourage young people to become more actively involved in their communities and in voluntary activity. Whilst this sounds great, if some of the more radical suggestions come into force, we could find that volunteering becomes compulsory for all young people; we could even see a return to some form of national service! Now, I'm sure that there are those who feel that what these 'youths' need is a bit of discipline; but I for one am concerned that this isn't really what is needed for young people who have been demonised so much that they are all seen as a scourge on society.

Being young is not an illness requiring a cure, nor is it a problem for which we must find an imaginative solution. I was stunned recently to hear various media types hailing the technological advancement that is the 'Mosquito Teen Repellent'. The what!?! Apparently this

is a device that emits a high-pitched sound that is inaudible to adults, but is unbearable to young people, thus dispersing the little blighters from public places. As my Nan would have said, "Ooh, it beggars belief!" I shan't dwell any more on this horrific abuse of civil liberties as the very thought of it is aggravating my ulcer.

I recently personally witnessed a group of young people acting in a far more civilized manner than some so-called 'grown ups'. On the bus on my way home from work I found myself sat next to a smartly dressed, middle-aged lady who, on four occasions during the ten-minute journey, shifted herself onto one buttock and broke wind in a most aggressive fashion! She followed each flatulation with a muttered "Ah, that's better". Assorted sniggers and murmurs of discontent were heard from around the bus, apart from the group of young people sat nearby, who politely stifled their chuckles. One poor lad even whimpered in pain as he held back his urge to laugh. Highly commendable!

So, with this in mind, how should politicians involve themselves in the issue of encouraging young people to be more active and enthusiastic citizens? My personal preference would be that they simply accept that being young is the period in everyone's life when they have an opportunity to be adventurous, test the boundaries they are faced with, take a few risks, and discover what the world around them has to offer. This is probably a little simplistic and maybe too idealistic, but it must be worth a try.

In researching the various policies that are being proposed, I stumbled across the Official Monster Raving Loony Party web site. Their proposal is ...er ... unusual, but could provide the answer. They suggest that 'hoodies' should be banned and that all young people should be required to wear a top hat. Excellent - Everyone's happy!

Matt Lilley



Feedback on Your Feedback

A big, big thank you to all of you who returned your recent volunteer questionnaires so quickly. The full results of these will be on the web site in a few weeks. However, we thought you might like to see the comments regarding the Newsletter, so here goes!

You felt that our Volunteer Newsletter is:



Very good 34%	Good 42%	Okay 22%	Poor 2%
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Of the 17 volunteers who didn't currently receive the newsletter, 12 said they'd like to receive it in the future.

We also received a number of useful comments and suggestions for improving our volunteer newsletters in future. Below are listed the main findings and the related actions we will be taking in response to your suggestions.

You said...Please can you include more information about projects and fundraising activities

We will...As a matter of course, keep you up-to-date with such information. Obviously in the past year, whilst we have been redeveloping and launching our new programmes, we have delivered fewer projects than in previous years, but this will change over time.

You said...Please can we receive the newsletter by e-mail, rather than in the post

We will...Continue to post the newsletter on our web site (www.focus-charity.co.uk) and send out an e-mail alert to those of you who request this, rather than posting a hard copy. Note: Please send Gill an e-mail to admin@focus-charity.co.uk if you would like to request this service.

You said...We would like to see more comments and stories from participants

We will...where possible, include these in future editions.

You said...Please include more photos in the newsletter

We will...shortly be putting photos onto the 'Photo Gallery' on the web site, rather than including additional photos in the newsletter itself (as this will take up space that we can use for articles).

You said...Please restrict the newsletter to 4 pages

We will...try to ensure that all articles are concise and 'pithy', and free from too much 'waffle'. The size of each edition of the newsletter is largely determined by the amount of news we have to report.

You said... that we should stop asking for money in our newsletter

We will...continue to include the donation form, without wishing to offend or pressurise, as it raises much needed unrestricted income, and if we don't ask, we don't get. However, we fully recognise that some people give their time rather than their money, and we recently updated the form to include the phrase "If you are now in a position whereby you could donate to help fund our work, we would be very grateful for your support".

You said...Please can you let us know what former volunteers are up to now

We will...Include such stories, when we have them. So if you have a story to tell that you'd like other volunteers to know, please let us know. Any stories should be e-mailed to Gill.

You said...The quality of photos and printing is variable

We will...improve our in-house printing later this year. It is not currently cost effective for us to have our newsletter produced by professional printers. We will also invest in higher quality cameras to improve our photos. In the meantime, if any of you have good quality photos of recent or older projects, these are always very welcome.

That's all for this 'Feedback On Your Feedback'. Please continue to let us know what you think of all aspects of our work and we'll ensure that FOCUS just keeps getting better!

For those who entered the Prize Draw, the draw was held on March 15th, and the lucky winner was Caz Wright, who is now the owner of a brand new, shiny, black ipod Nano!

5... 4... 3... 2... 1...



Inspire Residentials are GO!

Ladies and gentlemen, are you sitting comfortably? After a year of planning, consultation, wishful daydreaming and fundraising, we can now proudly announce the launch of our 2nd main programme - Inspire! Thanks to a successful £149,998 grant (yippee), we'll now be able to run two residentials per summer, for the next three years, for Leicester participants. (The news was jubilantly celebrated here in the office with blueberry muffins and a drink or two).

Building on the past success of Bridge and InterAction, we're aiming for Inspire Residentials to be the best thing since sliced bread ...and then some! The projects will contain some familiar old favourites, such as Entertainment Day and Dream Day, but now young people will be more influential in the planning of the projects. This year, a team of young people from Getting FOCUSed (2005) will be meeting for several weeks before the summer to help with the planning, and we're intending to work as hard on getting the small things right, as much as the big things.

Improvements that we've already factored in include:

- Camcorders for every team, so no more trying to work out who can have them when, (only to then find out that the battery has run out).
- Digital Cameras for every team, with a photo printer, meaning that we can create a photo wall on the project, and get the very best of people's photos for everyone to see.
- A digital projector to premiere team movies up large, so no more crowding round a small telly in the main hall.
- A 'Chill-Out Café' offering free smoothies every day, and salad bars at lunch, making sure everyone gets their vitamins and energy for the day.
- A revamped Team Resource pack, with handy pull-out guides to energisers, games and reviews for quick reference.
- Participant friendly activity briefs, in colour and with pictures, and written with the help of young people.
- Accreditation opportunities for both participants and volunteers, helping everyone add recognition to their involvement should they wish it.
- A three year external evaluation study, adding credibility to our work, and helping FOCUS to measure both the short term and long term impact for our participants.
- The re-introduction of a core-team, to help plan, organise and run the residentials.

And this is just the start of it! The more ideas for improvements we get, the better, so do let us know. If we can make this year a success, we hope to be able to expand Inspire to other cities in the near future.



CALLING all Volunteers!

Finally there's a chance to get your teeth into some meaty volunteering opportunities, with the option of two Inspire Residentials this year. The projects will be team-based, and full of the usual fun and challenging activities you've come to expect of us. This year we've places for approximately 50-60 volunteers, and 3 (paid) core-team members, so please let Gill know ASAP if you'd like to be involved. (See page 2 for our contact details). Hope to hear from you soon!

Project 1: 5th -13th August, Bilton Grange school, Rugby
Project 2: 19th -27th August, Bilton Grange school, Rugby

'My FOCUS Experience'

By Clare Thomasson

My first experience of FOCUS was as a delegate. I was originally on a graduate training scheme for work (which is extremely competitive, beginning with the selection process). We were constantly competing against each other to get the best jobs, the best salary etc, so we were always very focused on completing the tasks we were given and this was always so much more important than worrying about the people around us.

I was never very good at understanding people anyway so this suited me quite well. But after a year my company signed us up for a 'Management Training course', which used FOCUS residentials as a way of helping us to develop into future managers. We would be joining a residential for a few days, and a 'coach' would observe us and have individual sessions with each of us to discuss ways to improve our 'people skills'.

Coming from such a competitive environment, we were put into the middle of a FOCUS residential - a real culture shock! From feeling very important at work, our status in the teams seemed to be somewhat lower than usual. It appeared to me that no-one seemed to be concerned about getting tasks finished on time, and I

couldn't understand why no-one seemed keen to take on the helpful suggestions I had made. I felt completely out of my depth. It was really hard to sit and watch while someone wasted precious minutes trying to do something I could see was not going to work; I wanted to shout out "No! Do it this way! Let me do it!". It took a long time for it to sink in that it was more about the people than the task, and that getting everyone involved to the best of their ability was more important than completing the activity on time.



I also started to overcome my shyness and talk a bit more to the volunteers. Even so, having to spend so much time working closely with the team was something I found exhausting and stressful, because I was so used to doing things on my own, in my own way.

The sessions with the coach were very

intense. We talked about how the team activities were going, how I was adjusting to this new way of doing things, what was worrying me and how I was feeling. I think I spent a lot of hours crying that week; I wanted to give up and go home, I felt I just wasn't suited to this way of working. But the coach helped me to untangle all the knots and I stuck it out. By the end of the week I was left feeling like a different person, like someone had taken me to pieces and put me back together in a different order.

I knew I hadn't handled the week very well, and I had found it very stressful. But I realised that if I kept trying, I might get better at it. So I came back, and kept coming back – I think it's been three and a half years now. It did get easier, I'm glad to say; in fact these days I really enjoy it! Sometimes things go wrong and it's a bit stressful, but I always feel better for it. When I see participants having a hard time on a residential, I remember how I felt the first time. It is such a joy to see how they change as the week goes on – they start to relax a bit, join in with the team more, and have fun, just as I did. Getting to know the volunteers is one of the main reasons I keep coming back, they are all such amazing people – always friendly, funny, and supportive. FOCUS has made such a difference to my life in so many ways, and I'm sure it will continue to do so.

*Thank you to all those of you who came to our **Christmas Social**... it was a great success. We finally ended up with 42 people, the dinner was lovely, (thanks Matt!) most people enjoyed the silly quiz, and fun was had by all, so thanks again!*

We now hope to hold a Social every six months, (as this was requested in the questionnaire), so we need to have an idea of the site size we need. Let us know if you would be interested, (we would give dates well in advance).



FOCUS ROSE AWARD

This is an award that is given out each quarter in memory of Rose Cubitt, a young volunteer who sadly died in 2000.

This spring, the award goes to Beverly Hayes of Bray & Bray solicitors in Leicester, who has given us over 30 hours pro bono support to sort out our office contract. With all the finer details involved there was considerable work to do.

Beverley Heys works in the commercial property department of Bray & Bray Solicitors. Beverly specialises in advising Landlords and Tenants in granting and taking commercial leases and has expertise in areas of offices, retail industrial units and broadcasting and telecommunications.

We would like to thank both her and her employers for their help in achieving a happy conclusion. We can now put our name on the door!

A Uniquely Challenging Event

We are very pleased to be able to report that in January 2006 we re-launched our unique management-training course, the Challenge Residential.

This event brought together the senior management team of Ascribe PLC, an international health care software company and pupils from Crown Hills Community College, Leicester. Over four days the management delegates were supported in developing their leadership skills and in building their newly formed team, whilst providing an opportunity for a group of Year 7 & 8 pupils to develop their team-working, problem-solving and interpersonal skills.



In the past we have delivered these events in conjunction with a management training company, but this re-launch provided the first opportunity for us to run them solo.

Ascribe's CEO, Graham Lewis, has previously attended courses with us and described his experiences as, "the most powerful personal development opportunities [he] has ever been involved in." And it was those previous experiences that inspired him to contact FOCUS when he took on his new position with Ascribe.

"This is my second of these management events, and I am now more convinced than ever that it is the best way to initiate team building. It provides an amazing learning experience and brings total satisfaction and sense of achievement... It's win, win, win, all the way!" Graham Lewis, Ascribe

For the young people the Challenge Residential experience provided a unique opportunity to work alongside experienced business managers, to learn from one another and to develop a better understanding of

the value of teamwork, effective communication, and the planning and reviewing processes.

"My favourite moment was the acting, trying the high-ropes, and... to tell the truth, I loved everything" Huda, aged 13

Challenge Residentials typically place eight young people, often recruited from both a mainstream school and a school for pupils with special educational needs, in teams alongside four management training delegates. The FOCUS volunteers support the teams as they undertake a series of team-building, problem-solving, drama and adventure activities. Teachers provide additional support and help the young people to reflect on how their experiences relate to their work and behaviour back at school. Finally, each team is supported by a management-training consultant, who addresses issues relating to leadership, interpersonal skills and personal goals.



We hope that during 2006 we will be able to market Challenge Residentials more widely & involve young people and management delegates from across the country.

For information about these events and how you and your organisation can get involved, please contact Matt Lilley on 0116 251 0369, or e-mail: hsd@focus-charity.co.uk



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DONATION FORM

FOCUS, 73 Churchgate, Leicester, LE1 3AN
www.focus-charity.co.uk



Registered Charity Number: 1068467



Just **£3 per month** (or £46.08/year with Gift Aid) will pay for all the necessary resources for a team on a Challenge Project or the bursary for a young person to attend a residential project.

"The thing I love most about FOCUS projects is the feeling I get whilst I'm there, when I'm back, and still in everyday life. It's tremendous and cannot be explained, only felt. It will make you feel of great importance and part of something special. It did for me"

Rachel Teague, Teenage Participant

Please help us to continue to make differences to the lives of young people like Rachel. FOCUS could not survive without the time and energy that our volunteers and supporters provide. We always hope that everyone who has been involved with FOCUS in whatever way, has also gained from their experiences. If you are now in a position whereby you could donate to help fund our work, we would be very grateful for your support.

Title: Mr / Mrs / Ms (Please circle)

Forenames: _____

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I'd like to make a **regular donation** to FOCUS of: £ _____ a month



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