



TIME TO LOOK FOR THE

GOOD BEHIND THE HOOD?

One of the major concerns of MYPs since the start of the UK Youth Parliament in 2001 has been the way young people have been portrayed by the media. Negative stories about hoodies, ASBOs and yobs regularly appear in newspapers and on our TV screens, giving the impression

that the 'youth of today' are out of control and getting worse! In this special report, Andy Marlow, MYP for Birmingham, outlines what MYPs in the West Midlands plan to do about this issue (below) and UKYP's new Media Reps explain what they want to achieve in the year ahead (p.14).

The minority always spoils it for the majority



By Andy Marlow, MYP for Birmingham

According to a survey published by Ofsted in November

2007, 80% of young people have never taken or even tried drugs and 73% have never smoked. Yet the headlines will always speak of an epidemic of unprecedented proportions when talking about young people taking illicit substances, conveniently neglecting to mention the vast

majority who are innocent.

Do not get me wrong. I believe the press has a right and duty to report such news, to keep us informed of the situation in our country and further afield. And the growing numbers of young people engaging in illegal activities is indeed newsworthy and shocking stuff.

However, the unintended and unfortunate consequence of this is that young people often feel marginalised by the press.

They feel that an unfair portrait and stereotype is being painted of them. For some, such a stereotype causes more than just resentment and can encourage 'ASBO culture' by making it seem that, if they aren't acting like the yobs they hear about every day, they are somehow different.

All these reasons and more caused the West Midlands to choose "See the Good behind the Hood" as one of our three regional campaigns, and I was

lucky enough to be elected as the regional lead in this campaign.

Our plan is simple. If it is the press that is causing the negative stereotype, then it is the press that we must infiltrate to try to make the image fairer: a task which may sound too foolish and ambitious, but it has been done before. Several MYPs have in the past opened columns within local press and used them to showcase the work of UKYP and young people as a whole.

But local press would only be the beginning. In the mind mapping session, other ideas came up: establishing links with magazines such as Mizz and Sugar, getting deals with the BBC and some of their shows on both radio and TV, creating viral videos to put on youtube. There would also be an event to showcase the

talent of youth to show that we aren't all jobs.

Finally, these ideas in themselves would grow. Columns in local press would, with some luck and success, extend to regional and then national papers by the end of the year, and the youtube virals would ideally find themselves shown on national TV in the Channel Four political slot come election time.

All very ambitious stuff. But we believe that, with a bit of persistence and skill, we can achieve some real success. It is always better to aim high and not quite reach the target than to aim too low to make any kind of change.

And we acknowledge that these ideas will not change the ingrained perceptions of a sceptical public within a year. But

we hope that these initiatives will plant seeds in the media, which will grow even further, so that the fruits of our labour will be made apparent in ten or twenty years time.

Even better, should such schemes succeed, they would have far reaching benefits for UKYP's other campaigns. If we were to have a foothold in some national newspapers, we would be able to get all the press coverage we need to raise the profile of an issue.

So that is our plan for the year ahead. All very ambitious, as I have said, and without doubt we will face setbacks, but with careful planning and co-ordination, our campaign could have benefits for UKYP and young people as a whole for years to come.



Photos from the 'Media & Young People', a UKYP event held in Cambridge in March 2008

YOUTH OF TODAY: WE'RE NOT SO BAD!

- Teenagers are less likely to commit crimes now than they were in the early 1990s;
- we are half as likely to become parents as we were in 1970;
- we are twice as likely to stay at school after 16 than we were 35 years ago;
- we are more likely than our European counterparts to leave with the equivalent of five good GCSEs.

Source: Fran Abrams, Observer, March 2008

And remember ... to quote Robert Kennedy, former U.S. Attorney General ...

"This world demands the qualities of youth: not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the love of ease."



Photos: Media Reps take on their first challenge, generating press coverage of UKYP's debate at the House of Lords

MEET THE MEDIA REPS

Over 4 million. That is the number of people the new UK Youth Parliament Media Reps managed to tell about the House of Lords event through the press and media. Not bad!

You will be seeing a lot more of our Media Reps in the future as they work to increase the UK Youth Parliament's presence in the media and fight to ensure that young people are not discriminated against in the press. They have been elected to support press work in their regions and represent the UK Youth Parliament in the national media.

As you can see from the right, the new Media Reps are an ambitious lot. Watch out for them as they hit the airwaves and the newspapers near you soon! If you would like to get in contact with the UK Youth Parliament Media Reps or find out more about their work please contact Fiona McKinstry on 020 7843 6348 or email fiona.mckinstry@ukyouthparliament.org.uk



Sarah Baldwin
MYP for Leeds

"Over the next year I hope to publicise all the fantastic things UKYP does regionally and nationally. Through media we can promote our new campaign topics and also update young people and adults frequently. As only 12% of media stories about young people are positive I hope that we can raise the percentage and show, not only the young people we represent what we are doing for them, but adults too."



Daniel Olaiya
Deputy MYP
for Torbay

"What I really want to do is make some links with established organisations such as the BBC, Channel 4, Newsround and The Times. I think this will act as a catalyst for our campaigns. As the first ever Media Reps I feel it is our job to set the example for future Media Reps and to really help UKYP, after all that's why we were voted in. I also think we should utilise UKYP TV on the website - I have a few ideas for some projects we could put on it."



Nikky Gill
Deputy MYP
for Dudley

"As a Media Rep I hope to get the UKYP's profile raised to the extreme! I want every young person and as many adults to know all about us and what great work we do however big or small. I want media coverage as much as possible this year and I want to show the rest of the nation how we can make a change and make our mark! We need to show off our skills and prove to all MYPs it was a great idea for them to choose us. I want all our voices heard!!"