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Guernsey's Top Class Teenagers and the Press reaction to the publication of the Young People's Survey

The Guernsey Young People's Survey 2007 outlines the views, attitudes and behaviour of more than 2000 of the island's 10-17 year olds.

We asked over 100 questions in an on-line survey so that we can draw together an accurate picture of how young people live their lives today. Readers can see the complete set of findings by going to the website www.guernseysurvey.gg

Positive findings

The findings are positive and identify that the vast majority of young people in Guernsey are:

- proud to be Guernsey
- positive and confident
- concerned about their island
- lead healthy lives

We are particularly pleased that our young people have received such a positive endorsement from the UK's Schools' Health Education Unit. They say:

"At the Schools Health Education Unit, we continuously examine the behaviour and attitudes of young people. We believe that Guernsey young people compare well with young people elsewhere. You can quite rightly describe them as 'top-class teenagers'. The vast majority are positive and confident and they lead healthy, active lives. They are obviously proud of their island. The year 6 pupil results also show

that they are a credit to Guernsey."

Some concerns

Of course there are concerns. Our pupils are not immune from the pressures and anxieties that seem to blight the lives of young people today. The research indicates that 10%-15% of young people were not as positive as their contemporaries.

Amongst other issues, their view of the future, their self-esteem, life satisfaction and risk-taking behaviour have raised worries about how much they are enjoying their lives. Over the past few years there has been considerable reflection and discussion on young people's lives in Guernsey. For example, issues such as misuse of alcohol and young people's emotional well-being were all highlighted as priority areas of action in the recent Health and Social Services Departments consultation on priorities for health care. Departments and agencies recognise these as issues and are attempting to address them through initiatives such as the Drug and Alcohol Strategy. These findings will assist all those who work with young people as we now have such a wealth of information to interrogate. This will inform our work with young people over the coming years.

Supporting young people

Since the publication we have been

involved in numerous debates and discussions about how best we can support all young people. There has also been much soul-searching but we must not lose sight that, broadly, our young people are a credit to the island and we are doing well by them.

Results compared

All research is a snapshot in time and the Guernsey Young People's Survey 2007 is no exception to that rule. So when we compare our findings to other researches about young people and childhood we should take some relative comfort.

The year 2007 has offered little consolation for anyone concerned about the state of childhood in UK and continental Europe.

In February, a UNICEF report placed the UK at the bottom of an international league table for the well-being of children in 21 developed countries. More recently a major study on primary schools in England identified pervasive anxiety about young children, and their education. These worrying reports contrast strongly with the Guernsey Experience.

Happier, healthier lives

So, why is it that most of our children seem to be leading happier, healthier lives than their European contemporaries? Why are they 'top-class teenagers'? Between the three of us we have worked with Guernsey children for over 70 years and our experience highlights the following factors:

a - Real sense of community

Guernsey has retained a very real sense of community. That is evident by the very high numbers of young people who perceive themselves as being 'Guernsey'. But this sense of community is even more evident when we look at the robust and positive relationships that young people share with families and friends. This is very different from the experience recorded by

young people elsewhere.

b - Key, positive decisions

Key decisions have been made that have had a positive impact. In particular our schools have been encouraged to prioritise personal, social and health education and citizenship which has enabled young people to make decisions about their lives knowledgeably and confidently.

c - Group of support agencies

Guernsey has developed a group of support agencies that are excellent professionals. Bodies such as Drug Concern, the Guernsey Sports Commission, GASP, the Police and the Complementary Health Education Unit have all been successful in working with young people and getting their message across.

Finally, making young people's lives happier and healthier does not happen by accident. Credit should go to everyone who works with young people especially parents. But let's not forget young people themselves who are the ones who have earned the title 'Top-Class Teenagers' and they should be recognised for this accolade.

Press reaction to the publication of the Young People's Survey

We believe that the reaction to the Survey says much about Guernsey as a community. Since we launched the Survey we have had a busy time sharing the findings. The reaction has been similar regardless of who is discussing it:

- Most people were not surprised at the findings and would comment that they had positive opinions about Guernsey's young people.

- There has been very genuine concern about the minority of young people whose responses were less positive. Individuals and organisations have not been judgemental about the responses. The focus

has always been: 'what can we do to help?'

Unfortunately, the Press response was not so constructive, as Alun Williams describes:

"I was very disappointed at the response of the Guernsey Press. Their sensationalist approach reflects a betrayal of young people and a missed opportunity to reflect accurately the views of an important sector of the community.

We were absolutely honest and transparent with the press, allowing them complete access to the findings. We also fully briefed a journalist so that they understood the context of the Survey.

I genuinely believe that the headline news should have been the endorsement from international experts that we have 'Top Class Teenagers'. The Press chose to lead with the headline, *One Third of Girls Aged 15 are having Sex*".

What happened next?

The press coverage of the report led to some intriguing correspondence which was played out on the pages of the Guernsey Press and the airwaves of the local radio stations. We wrote a letter outlining our concerns which was supported by an unprecedented letter of complaint jointly signed by the Ministers of Health and Education. We then received over fifty letters and emails of support.

The Guernsey Chamber of Commerce was incensed with the coverage. They considered it to be indicative of the negative approach to island news that was pursued by the local press. This has triggered a project called Guernsey Wow which is an initiative to publicise all the positive aspects

of Guernsey life. This will culminate in a quality magazine being circulated to all island homes over the next few weeks.

Future plans for the survey

The survey has done its job in providing an evidence-base about the island's young people. In particular we have seen the following developments:

- Each school has assessed its own results and are now in the process of considering the most effective response that each school should follow

- We briefed all senior managers in the Guernsey police who are now considering how to address the safety issues that have been raised

- There is an 'alcohol summit' planned in spring to consider how to educate young people about alcohol issues

- Projects to consider school-wide responses to emotional well-being are being piloted in three schools this year

- The island's charities and voluntary agencies are supporting the NCH 'growing strong' campaign which is intended to equip staff to help young people who are vulnerable to mental health/ emotional worries

- A children's congress will be held in May. The congress will outline the issues that young people feel should be considered by the new Guernsey parliament that will be elected in April

GAMBLING EDUCATION SEMINARS

Tacade is holding free regional seminars for those working with Young People
Exeter - 8 May, 2008

Further seminars to be held in London, Newcastle, Leeds and Southampton

Each participant will receive free copies of both new resources

Details from: www.tacade.com and click onto 'Gambling'