



The Truth about Youth Comes Out

Hundreds of young people descend on Villa Park to tell Birmingham's decision makers the Truth about Youth

Thursday 12th November saw over 300 Young People from 27 of Birmingham's Schools and Colleges descend on Villa Park to voice their views and opinions to Birmingham's local decision makers and media figures at the Truth about Youth Big Debate.

The Big Debate was a landmark event for the young people of Birmingham as it provided a unique opportunity for them to meet with key representatives from local government, the media and the business sector and have an interactive and positive discussion on issues affecting Birmingham's youth today.

The event featured a fantastic panel line-up including Ben Godfrey from BBC Midlands Today, Alun Thorne, Head of Business for the Birmingham Post and Guardian journalist Rowenna Davis. As well as media representatives the debate featured local decision makers Cllr Reg Corns, Cllr Paulette Hamilton and Cllr Les Lawrence, Prof James Arthur from Birmingham University and PC Simon Bolwell from West Midlands Police.

The Truth about Youth Debate aimed to dispel the myths that young people are apathetic and disengaged and to challenge the negative media stereotypes of youth. The debate also served to introduce young people to key decision makers, to show them who to approach and how to make contact.

Envision student, Joanna Lockett, aged 17, said, "The Big Debate has inspired me to campaign for a youth page in our local Sutton Coldfield newspaper, there are not enough facilities for young people and our voices need to be heard."

Envision's Programme Manager, Andrew Ridge, said, "It was truly inspiring to see so many Young People from Birmingham attend an event like this and to hear how passionate they are about making a positive difference to their communities."

The issues discussed in the Big Debate originated from the opinions canvassed from Envision students from across the UK prior to the event. The debate generated discussions on:

Media responsibility in representative reporting

Students challenged panellists from the media on their representation of young people. They called for more balanced media coverage of young people emphasising the difficulty in getting positive media stories about young people published.

Isabella Silvers, aged 17, King Edwards Five Ways said, "After the debate I now have a desire to help change the created identity of young people"

Engaging young people in local decisions

Students called on local councillors to take account of their views and opinions when making decisions that affect their local communities and neighbourhoods. Students learnt how to make contact with their local councillors and whole heartedly welcomed the opportunity to be part of community decisions.

Dale Williams, Baverstock School said, "I want to make myself heard and let people know about what the youth are doing."

Developing positive relations with the police

Students spoke about how they felt discriminated and labelled as trouble makers. PC Bolwell encouraged students to make contact with their local constabulary and to voice their concerns.

Dua'a Dhafer, King Edwards Five Ways said, "We should challenge authority and people in power about how they show young people and what they think about young people"

The Big Debate marked the launch of the Truth about Youth campaign run by youth empowerment charity Envision in partnership with The Cooperative Foundation. The Big Debate is just the first of many other events, activities and programmes that will give a voice to the views and opinions of the young people of Birmingham. Over the course of the 2 year campaign the Truth about Youth will aim to support over 700 young people to deal positively with the challenge of growing up in a culture which has a widespread negative perception of youth.

To see more photos of the event go to www.envision.org.uk/news_items

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Notes to editors:

For more information, photographs or to arrange an interview please contact :

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Envision

- Envision provides young people with the opportunity to make a difference. The charity was established in 2000 by four young people who wanted to challenge the stereotype that young people are apathetic and disengaged.
- Today Envision supports 16-19 year olds from 100 schools and colleges in Greater London, Birmingham and Leeds, helping over 3000 young people every year to design their own local community projects tackling issues ranging from street crime to climate change.

Truth about Youth

- The Truth About Youth campaign aims to support over 700 young people over the course of 2-years to deal positively with the challenge of growing up in a culture which has a widespread negative perception of youth, and increase levels of

interaction between young people and adults to raise mutual understanding and develop projects in which they all have an interest and for those projects to have a lasting benefit.

- **supporting young people** to deal positively with the challenge of growing up in a culture which has a widespread negative perception of youth
- **increasing levels of interaction** between young people and adults to raise mutual understanding and develop projects in which they all have an interest and for those projects to have a lasting benefit
- **engaging young people** to identify and set up their own cooperative projects which address their needs and demonstrate young people's value to society
- **co-ordinating youth activity** into a media campaign to increase the positive coverage of youth issues
- **creating opportunities** for young people to engage with wider audiences from private, public and voluntary sectors and to positively influence the attitudes wider audiences hold
- **creating a network** of young people willing and able to continue to build on the impact of this project