

The Street Weapons Commission

Rosemary Dickson

Chair

Rosemary Dickson thank you very much indeed for coming in and a very warm welcome from both myself and my colleagues on this commission. Um you're the project manager and you're going to tell us quite a lot about the project that you run. The acronym is FARE which stands for Family Action in Roger Field and Easterhouse and of course here we are in Easterhouse and you live in Easterhouse. A lot about that. To put Easterhouse into context and in the public domain I notice that there was a Sunday newspaper article, a local Sunday newspaper article, just about a year ago which describe in pretty graphic terms what certainly was happening in this area. High unemployment, poor housing, failed children, drug abuse, violence, overwhelming poverty. Now you may quarrel with that. I don't know whether that was a fair perception of what is happening here but certainly there is and perhaps certainly was a problem and you're very much at the forefront of dealing with that and making some significant inroads I think of improvement. Can you tell us exactly a, how you became involved with it and what FARE is doing in this area of Easterhouse and in Rogers Field?

Rosemary Dickson

The organisation itself was started up in 1989 by the local people who lived in the Rogers Field area. At that stage there were no amenities. Very poor shopping facilities and no amenities at all for young people. No services for young people at all. And the families everything that you've just stated that was in the newspaper article that was the day to day experience of the families that were living in the area.

Chair

Would you think that was a fair comment at the time?

Rosemary Dickson

It's not pleasant to hear and for people living in the area who are constantly told that they're poor, they're deprived, high rates of this, high rates of that. That's not pleasant to hear. In comparative terms it's probably accurate with other areas in the country. However ... I think the media have a role to play in how people perceive themselves. If you constantly drip feed negative information to people about themselves it's not a great surprise that they don't feel particularly positive about themselves and they don't have particularly positive aspirations. So part of the work that FARE do is pretty much about that. It's about broadening people's horizons. It's about meeting the needs of the local community. So that's what the organisation was set up to do. In order to do that and recognise people as people and not INAUDIBLE or drug user or we don't categorise people. We work in the area on a long term basis to provide a diverse range of services that will meet the needs of people at different stages of their life. That five year old whose main need is to come home from school and know that there's food on the table and wants to meet their pals is the same 14 year old who is concerned about their appearance. And whether they're going to get on OK at school or what people think of them, who is the same 23 year old that's the young mum then trying to bring up the next generation of children with kind of positive aspirations.

Chair

And you've got I think what has been described to us in the pre brief is a three way, a three pronged attack to improve the area.

Rosemary Dickson

Yes. In terms that's in particular in relation to the territorial nature of the area. If anybody doesn't know Easterhouse probably the only thing they have heard about it relates to deprivation and gangs. You know and that's the broader perspective, and the broader information, that people have about Easterhouse. When I started working with FARE originally it very quickly

became apparent that the territorialism that exists in Easterhouse doesn't just affect, and it's not just about people that are involved in gangs, it affects everybody that lives in the area. It certainly affects every young person that lives in the area. If a young person you could have the most fantastic facility, the most fantastic service, but if you can't access that service it may as well be built on the moon. If somebody's life revolves around three or four streets because they have been identified with a gang that is associated.

Chair

It's called postcode areas in London and I think to some extent in the midlands of England as well but it's the same thing. It's the turf.

Rosemary Dickson

It's much smaller than that.

Chair

Yeah sure. And it affects children and young people I understand that, sadly. Are you saying it affects the adults as well?

Rosemary Dickson

Yes.

Chair

So right the way through the age group the territory matters.

Rosemary Dickson

Given that in areas like London and other areas throughout Britain gang culture is a relatively new phenomenon and in a lot of areas it's almost like an Americanised phenomenon linked to bling and music. It's a generational thing in Glasgow. You know so in Easterhouse ... in the Easterhouse as we

currently know it the post war Easterhouse which is the Easterhouse which people think they know the gangs have existed virtually as long as Easterhouse as existed. So within some families you're talking third and fourth generation gang member. So if people don't have a lot else that's positive in their life and they don't get status or esteem from something else in their life for some people the only reality is the only esteem that they're ever going to have is being a gang member. So it can actually still affect adults who still can't go into particular areas. It's certainly affects aspirations and employment opportunities. You know so ... the effects of that can still be seen you know in adults.

Commissioner

Am I right in thinking that school whether it be a primary school or a secondary school is the one territory where groups from different parts of Easterhouse would necessarily mix? In other words the school doesn't cater for just one gang related area. So why is it so impossible for there to be programmes within schools that begin to address this territorialism?

Rosemary Dickson

It's not and in fact a lot of the work that we do we actually in terms of tackling the territorialism we take a three pronged approach if you like ... some of that is educational because we will always, always be putting resources into working with gangs and putting resources into the justice system. If we don't also do something to try and discourage people from getting involved in gangs in the first place. We work at the primary seven level which is the level just prior to going to high school they then will be mixing with people from different areas. And at primary seven in every school in Greater Easterhouse we deliver an eight week what's called a territorial history project. The start of that project goes back to looking at the history of Greater Easterhouse. There have been dwellings in this area since the 1400s

you know people categorise Easterhouse as the kind of post war Easterhouse that they currently know. There have been dwellings in this area since the 1400s. We encourage the children to explore the history of the area. To enable them to see that actually change has occurred over the years therefore change can occur again. The Easterhouse as they know it and the culture as they know it currently isn't how it has to stay. That can change and they've got the power to change it. We then go on to look at the gangs and how they emerged. The influence of the gangs. What it means to be involved in the gangs. And in looking at that you know they look at the gang member or the head gang member might be the person who has the esteem, you know has peoples fear. Everybody certainly knows them. We then look at OK what is the reality of that person that you aspire to be because you know if you don't have another positive role model in your life that maybe the position that you aspire to have when you're 16/17. What is the reality of their life. And we use some of the materials like DVD, we have the children involved in creative writing. They go out on visits. And we use other film footage as well. But we use them as tools for discussion and for them to explore what it means to be the gang member. And the reality where they actually examine what the reality of that gang member is. The person that they think has all the status. The reality is their life may revolve around four streets. So it doesn't matter if they would like that good job. If they cannot travel to that good job they can't get it. It doesn't matter if they like that girl that stays several streets away. She's from a different area. They can't go in there. So they don't even get to know that area.

Commissioner

To what extent do these school programmes actually involve parents?

Rosemary Dickson

In our experience the parents that we would most like to reach are the parents

who are least likely to come along to any parenting programme that we would run. We're educating the children and as a result of that educational programme that we're delivering to primary sevens those children are then going home and speaking to their parents about what they are finding out in school. When we initially started this work we did it as a very small pilot in a small geographical area, although it was a relatively small geographical area there were five primary schools in that area and three very definite different gang areas. Within the geographical area. Prior to starting the programme the diversion activities, the youth clubs that we run within our premises 99.9% of the children who came to the youth club would have been from the immediate area. After piloting this work for a two year period we were then able to show that there were children from five different areas coming along to the youth clubs. More importantly than that given that they were primary aged children their parents initially started bringing. An anecdote – we had feedback from one parent that she had crossed a piece of land that she in her life had never crossed to bring her child. You're talking ... maybe a 1000 yards away. You're not talking a great distance.

Chair

And she had not crossed this as a child?

Rosemary Dickson

She had never crossed a piece of land.

Chair

But she'd also not crossed it as an adult?

Rosemary Dickson

Ah ha. She hadn't crossed it as an adult until she brought her child to our youth club and then subsequently the child was you know after a period of

time the child was allowed to freely come. So children are educating their parents. We're getting anecdotal feedback that there's a dramatic reduction in the recruitment of new gang members as a result of that work.

Now we're not naïve. If there was one simple solution to any of this we wouldn't be sitting having this discussion just now because we would all be applying that solution and we would all be doing it. So we're also looking at OK that's great we've maybe convinced young people it's not a brilliant idea to get involved in gangs. What do they do? You know do they then ignore them as a society? No so we provide diversionary activities. Young people should have the same rights as everybody else and their needs should be met.

Commissioner

But you talk about volunteering and much of your work is done by volunteers. Are they recruited from the same small area to serve that small area which might reinforce the kind of territorialism or how do you recruit volunteers? How do you train them? How do you connect with other services that are available? Those kinds of questions really.

Rosemary Dickson

To support what we do a lot of volunteers will help to decorate the buildings, or take children on holiday or whatever. We're in this for the long haul. This is a situation that has had a long incubation period. A long time to emerge. It's existed for a long time. We're not going to change the situation overnight. What we're trying to do is as much about changing attitudes as it is behaviour. That takes time. We are very keen to have local people involved in the delivery of services. And ... about 80% of the people who work in our organisation come from the Greater Easterhouse area. About 50% of those are actually home-grown and were young people who years ago started going to our youth clubs and we have gradually provided opportunities

for them to then get training, to get academic qualifications and they're now back delivering services in the area. So they have the theory as well as the practise. They have the local knowledge and they had the credibility of local people. Because of the local involvement involved in the delivery of our services we can very quickly amass information, intelligence that no questionnaires and no amount of focus groups would enable us to gather.

Commissioner

So you're in the community centre tell us about that?

Rosemary Dickson

The community centre is basically we're in a tenement block of flats which we moved into in 1997. The organisation had no premises prior to that. We moved into that in 1997 and at that stage it was a derelict building. There had been three drug related deaths up this close so nobody would live in it. The management committee negotiated with the housing department as it was then, who agreed to rent the premises to us. At that stage it was great. We had these premises. We didn't know whether we had the resources to run it and we didn't know whether anybody would use it. That was in 1997. We have grown and the service delivery has involved at that stage we delivered services in the Roger Field and surrounding areas. Over the years we have expanded and we now deliver services Greater Easterhouse wide. Right across Greater Easterhouse. The tenement block of flats was six flats, two bedrooms, one sitting room, one bathroom within each flat. Within the building we now deliver six youth clubs a week within the building. We have a community café which is an essential part of bringing people in the door. The café is not run on a commercial basis. That's what brings people in for a cup of tea, a blether, that's where we find out what the needs of the community are. Who's going through a particularly difficult phase? What child who is normally cheerful is coming in showing that you know they're subdued

or equally somebody who's normally fairly quiet is more boisterous. That indicates to us that there's something else going on there. We have developed a multi disciplinary team over the course of the years so we have people who are qualified in sport. We have people who are community education qualified. We have people who are social work qualified. We've a diverse range of skills within the team. We work very, very closely as a team so we provide a wide range of diversionary activities within the building. That also acts as the hub where we organise and plan the other outreach activities that we deliver.

Commissioner

And what influence has FARE been able to have on the quality and range of services that Glasgow city Council provides?

Rosemary Dickson

I think it has it certainly has had an influence. If we can say about eight years ago I think it was we started up a breakfast club. Eight or nine years ago we started up a breakfast club that run from half seven to nine am in the morning because we recognised children were not going to school or turning up late for school or ill prepared for school. We started up this breakfast club and in the breakfast we had envisaged it would probably be working parents who would send their children to the breakfast club.

Chair

A breakfast club for children?

Rosemary Dickson

Breakfast club for children prior to going to primary. The reality was ... children from all backgrounds came along to the breakfast club and they were keen to come because they met with their friends, there was social

interaction, we knew they had a healthy breakfast because we were providing the breakfast. We knew that the wee person who was coming in and who was a bit quiet and a bit kind of worried because they hadn't done their homework. We were able to provide assistance for them. So the person who would normally have dragged their school bag up and gone into school at half past nine really not wanting to go ending up skipping up the road to school. We were the only breakfast club registered with the Education Department. At that time. And I've got to say Glasgow City Council then subsequently provided free breakfast club in all primary schools in Glasgow. I would like to say we had some.

Commissioner

How important do you think it is to be local led and community led?

Rosemary Dickson

I think there are two aspects of it. I think the local ... local people are the experts. They're the people who walk in their footprints. They know what their needs are. Other people might have a broader awareness on how to perhaps meet those needs. But local people are the experts in local peoples lives and what's needed in the local community. Within our organisation there are people who actually don't live in the local area. I was born and brought up in Glasgow South Side equivalent of Easterhouse so I have had very close affinity with the issues in the area. I think it's essential to have local people with the local knowledge. I think it's essential, I am not the person who goes out on the front line doing street work to link with gangs. Regardless of what behind my eyes I think I look like to a 14 year old gang member the INAUDIBLE barrier between me having credibility and talking to the gang member. We put the appropriate people to be delivering the appropriate tasks to the people who we have out on the streets doing street work. Young people who gang members know. Have walked the walk and talked the talk

and they can relate to them. I think it's essential to have local people involved because they are the experts. I think it's also important to have someone who's actually able to take a step back from that and perhaps take an objective view to counteract what you were saying earlier about how do you know you're not just maintaining the same culture.

Chair

Mrs Dickson thank you very much for coming and thank you for giving us such a clear picture of what you're doing in the area and if I may say many congratulations on what you're achieving. For today on behalf of all of us thank you for coming.

Rosemary Dickson

OK thank you.

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