



Commission for
Rural Communities

Tackling rural disadvantage

Making Best Practice Stick

Rural Youth Projects: Teesdale Community Resources (TCR)



An operating division of the Countryside Agency

“You help plan it,
and we’ll help you
make it happen”

Introduction

Teesdale Community Resources (TCR) is based in Barnard Castle, a market town in Teesdale District, County Durham. Teesdale, a beautiful rural area surrounding the upper reaches of the River Tees to just west of the railway town of Darlington, is County Durham's largest District, covering an area of 324 square miles. Its population, of 25,000, is, however, the smallest. Often described as the northernmost of the Yorkshire Dales, the District's economy is largely dependent on agriculture, tourism and pharmaceuticals (GlaxoSmithKline is the biggest employers in the area), all three of which have suffered and contracted in recent years.

TCR was started in 1978 by Philip Hughes, an ex-RAF pilot concerned by the lack of opportunities and facilities for young people in the District. Philip is still involved and is chairman of TCR. One of the first things that the project did was to gather information about young people's needs. Part of this work was done from a mobile unit which the project operated for thirteen years, with support from a variety of organisations, including local authorities, the Manpower Services Commission, and the Rural Development Commission.

From this early work grew the project's emphasis on training and development and the understanding that it could not rely on short-term, target-linked funding from organisations that were themselves subject to policy-led changes. In the words of Keith Jones, TCR's manager, the project had to: *"... take risks, have a go, and become entrepreneurial, whilst remaining accountable"*. This philosophy helps to explain TCR's Board's guiding principle that their job is to help others realise their plans. In Keith's words: *"One of our mottos is, You help plan it, and we'll help you make it happen"*. This principle appears to have worked very well during the project's twenty-eight years of operation.

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TCR's work

In essence, people bring ideas to TCR, and TCR helps them to plan and implement them (the project is now working with the children of the young people who were involved with the project in the 1970s!). In some senses, therefore, the project is much more about helping others to do things than it is about the project doing things. This enabling approach also gives project staff the opportunity to provide wide-ranging information, advice and guidance to young people. The project also takes every opportunity to encourage its young people (and there are 420 of them currently registered with TCR) to extend their involvement beyond training, and into volunteering.

Some of Teesdale Community Resources' projects & activities

- Music
- Supporting the Radio Teesdale project
- Motor vehicle maintenance (a related aim is to reduce vehicle-related accidents and crime)
- Wheels to Work
- Integrated, affordable and accessible Community Transport
- Dance
- Art
- Digital Photography
- Animation
- "Chill out" space (a meeting place)
- "Sex, Drugs & Rock & Roll" - Information, advice and guidance project
- Affordable Housing
- Development of new centre for TCR
- International exchange visits
- Councillors Question Time
- Local Strategic Partnership Consultation
- Skate park
- Youth café (now operated by the YMCA in Barnard)
- Daleks Project – *Exterminate* Drugs!

For example, Trevor Honeyman, a former Glaxo manager interested in music, whose son was involved with TCR, heard that TCR was involved in music-related projects.

Trevor contacted TCR and, as a direct result of that first meeting in 2004, Radio Teesdale was born. A steering group was set up and two Restricted Service Licences (the permissions needed to operate a radio station) were obtained. Eventually, it is hoped to operate the station from within TCR's proposed new building in Barnard Castle. The project gave TCR the opportunity to teach young people about the world of radio, and to train them in aspects of running a radio station. Whilst this approach has given young people skills, it has also allowed them to voice their opinions whilst learning and having fun.

Some of the initial trainees on the music project are now helping to train other young people. These, in turn, and on a voluntary basis, are helping 8 to 10 year olds to learn about music (i.e. a third generation of young people is now being helped by TCR). Practical, informal training is, therefore, central to TCR's work. The types of training and related opportunities offered are based on the views, and needs, of young people. Some of TCR's projects and activities are listed in table above.

As the project's catchment area is very rural, mobile and outreach provision are vital to its way of operating, and to its success. In 2001 a second, informal survey of needs produced information – mainly anecdotal – that, together with other, more recently gathered information, was used to inform the area's Local Strategic Partnership's Community Plan. An informal approach was adopted both to ensure that young people felt relaxed enough to give their true opinions, and also because project workers had become aware that many felt that they were being "over-consulted", and that there was a need, therefore, for a more relaxed process. Project staff were also aware that young people, like most people, become increasingly frustrated if their views are often asked for, but never acted upon.

TCR's staff recognise the desirability, and worthiness, of the Government's aim that every young person should have access to a safe place where they can meet their friends within half an hour's travel of their homes. They also recognise, however, how difficult, if not impossible, it is to achieve this in a rural area like Teesdale – hence the importance of mobile and outreach provision, and the ever-present concerns about how to get the money needed to pay for these, and similar, rural services.

It is believed that these – rural - difficulties are not fully appreciated by policy makers. There is also disappointment that young people's needs and aspirations (e.g. access to affordable transport, housing, dance, music, a youth café, and improved facilities for motor vehicle maintenance), are more often noted than met.

In order to strengthen its finances and independence, and to improve its facilities and range of activities, TCR is in the process of redeveloping its site, which it owns, with a view to building ten units of social housing, and a greatly improved centre for TCR's clients. The intention is to do this with Three Rivers Housing Association, and a local building contractor, BiT Construction.

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Where does the money come from?

Full-time and sessional youth staff are employed by Durham County Council.

Some of TCR's projects are, or have been, funded from a variety of sources, public, private, and charitable. For example the Wheels to Work scheme was initially supported by the Countryside Agency and Groundwork, is currently supported by the European Regional Development Fund and the Local Transport Plan, and will, from April, 2006, return to TCR.

Most of the money for the housing project will be raised from the sale of TCR's land.

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Summary

Teesdale Community Resources started, in 1977, with a budget of £400, and is now working with its third generation of young people. Today, with its plans for a new building, and the creation of ten units of much needed social housing, it has an annual turnover of approximately £230,000, and land assets of £2,000,000. Nevertheless, the fundamental financial challenges for this, as with many projects, remain much as they were in 1977. The annual government budgeting cycle, and the changes in policies and political priorities that, in turn, result in changes in the amount of money available to support projects, and the purposes to which that money can be put, makes it difficult for projects like TCR to plan, and to obtain money for running costs.

Putting these difficulties and frustrations to one side, however, it is clear that TCR has been successful, and has provided a great deal of training, and other help, both to Teesdale's young people, and to other organisations in the District. There are currently more than 400 people on TCR's books, and they are involved in a wide range of practical, creative, and entrepreneurial activities. Whilst Radio Teesdale is probably the most exciting project, it should not be allowed to obscure the other, less eye-catching, but in some ways more important projects, such as the Wheels to Work scheme, and the motor vehicle maintenance training.

The breadth of TCR's work for young people is impressive. The project has been operational for nearly a third of a century, a time of considerable change in policies and rural development programmes and organisations. Its story is a both a testament to the determination of all involved (including project staff, and others from a variety of public, private and voluntary sector organisations), and an excellent example of how an organisation can, by taking risks, and being creative, survive and grow in an ever changing world. Based on the evidence to date, it seems likely that TCR will still be developing and implementing projects in thirty years' time.

For more information about Teesdale Community Resources, contact:

Keith Jones
Teesdale Community Resources
New Depot
Birch Road
Barnard Castle
County Durham
DL12 8JR
Tel: 01833 690150
Email: tcr@tcrorg.demon.co.uk

**Commission for
Rural Communities**

London Office

20th Floor Portland House
Stag Place London SW1E 5RS

Telephone 0207 932 5800

Facsimile 0207 932 5811

Cheltenham Office

John Dower House Crescent Place
Cheltenham Glos. GL50 3RA

Telephone 01242 521381

Facsimile 01242 584270

Email info@ruralcommunities.gov.uk

www ruralcommunities.gov.uk

