

## FEATURE



■ Lowestoft's Dreamworx Youth Project has come up with an ingenious solution to the problem of wheelie bins being stolen from town streets. Pictures: SIMON LEE

# How we are working to stop our town's 'bin wars'

**B**in day in Lowestoft is perhaps not quite like bin day anywhere else. "On some estates people steal wheelie bins so you can't just leave your rubbish out to be collected as and when," explains a teenager from Dreamworx.

"People actually wait until the bin lorry is on their street before putting their bins out and take them straight back to their gardens.

"Some people who have jobs have actually paid neighbours to guard their bin so that it doesn't get stolen."

And of course if you don't have a bin for two weeks what do you do with your rubbish? It just gets dumped and litter starts becoming a serious health hazard.

It's a problem that young people in Lowestoft decided to take on after Dreamworx youngsters launched their youth action

Young people inevitably look at the world in a different way and where better to seek an innovative solution to a community 'bin wars' problem? **SUFFOLK COMMUNITY FOUNDATION** visits Lowestoft's Dreamworx Youth Project

project, which took the form of a community consultation project at every school in Lowestoft.

Hannah Harvey, Rhiannon Hale, Lauren Benjamin and Sharon Pull from Dreamworx, based at Gunton Baptist Church in Montgomery Avenue, explained that they surveyed all the schools with two questionnaires targeted at younger and older children.

"We wanted to know what concerned them about growing up in Lowestoft. We realised that the issues effecting a nine-year-old

were different from that of a 16-year-old," said Hannah.

This was followed up with two Big Dream conferences, firstly at Benjamin Britten School and then at The Ashley School, because they wanted to make sure young people with special needs also had a say.

The organising group involved 14 teenagers all of whom are young leaders with Dreamworx - and the conferences were such a success that the schools have asked them to repeat them next year.

"Topics under discussion



included the issues that were highlighted through the survey and were discussed with a panel of experts that included councillors, the police, media and local people.

"I think it's difficult for us to have our say in the community because people just think we are

young and don't take things seriously. We then feel as if we are not being listened to," said Rhiannon.

The project was funded through Suffolk Community Foundation's youth social action fund. This was kick-started by The Cabinet Office

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It is hoped that personalising people's wheelie bins will help to deter would-be thieves in Lowestoft. Photos SIMON LEE



and the Step up to Serve #IWill campaign to raise levels of youth volunteering in the East of England. Suffolk Community Foundation then doubled the funding by engaging support from private donors.

Grants manager Andrea Pittock said: "Dreamworx is an exciting element of the work of Signpost Gunton. They are working with some of the most deprived young people in the Waveney area, achieving significant engagement and higher levels of youth volunteering with this hard-to-reach group"

One of the key areas of discussion was litter in Lowestoft and as a result the Dreamworx team has decided to do something about it and taken this project further and come up with a 'Banksy'-style solution too.

**“I think it's difficult for us to have our say in the community because people just think we are young and don't take things seriously**

They firstly identified that much of the litter was caused because people's wheelie bins got stolen and as a result residents dumped household rubbish in the streets and alleyways.

To assess the scale of the problem they carried out a survey of the estates to find out the "litter" hotspots and were shocked and saddened by the result.

"So we ran a series of night walks and invited local councillors including Waveney Councillor Malcolm Cherry to come and walk with us to see what the situation was and to take our concerns further," said Rhiannon.

"We showed what it looked like from a young person's perspective and although they were aware of problems in children's playgrounds we showed them other places that had issues."

Some of the alleyways had become dumping grounds, they said, and in one spot they even found a filthy discarded mattress.

The Dreamworx young leaders then got their heads together with some of the younger children the project is involved with to come up with a plan.

"We decided that the problem at the root of it all was the wheelie

bins and if they didn't get stolen in the first place people wouldn't need to dump their rubbish."

They also identified that they needed to change the "culture" where people simply stole bins and removed any identifying numbers or stickers.

The solution they have come up with is to start personalising people's bins in a creative artistic way with indelible spray paint using a unique design for each.

They suggested homeowners could use something that's very personal - perhaps their family pet

or a favourite picture.

"We are getting the younger ones involved too by getting them to make the templates for each design."

With the help of Mr Cherry, the plan to modify the bins has now also been approved by the council.

Dreamworx co-ordinator, Louise Crisp said the next stage is to create a campaign to launch and fundraise for the project.

"We've got a prototype design and are now getting started and the thing that will make it work is that each bin will be unique."