

PRESS RELEASE – April 2009

Village Champions for Youth Win Top Community Award

A group of village volunteers, who set up a host of activities for local teenagers, have scooped this year's prestigious Richmond Award from Action in rural Sussex (AirS).

The Billingshurst Community Partnership established a youth projects team, lead by local mother Denise Campbell. She now runs a weekly youth club at the village hall and has organised a programme of activities from graffiti workshops to dance nights and popular youth band events, known as BilliRox.

Denise also encourages youngsters to volunteer their time for local businesses and community groups with an innovative Youth Enterprise Scheme. Now some 24 teenagers spend at least four hours a week helping out, in exchange for credits for vouchers or day trips of their choice.

The partnership will receive their award from the Duke of Richmond at a celebration event at the village hall on Thursday 2 April 2009. The Duke will also present community service awards to local youngsters, including Denise's daughter Hannah.

The Richmond Award, launched in 2006, is designed to recognise the work of a community or individual considered by AirS staff to have done the most to encourage and ensure that young people remain in their local community.

The Duke, who was President of AirS from 1973 to 2005 said: "Through the work of Action in rural Sussex, staff come across many examples of good work designed to make sure that rural villages can be places that young people want to stay and build their lives in.

"They also meet people determined to seize the initiative and make a positive contribution in their local community – people like Denise and her colleagues in the partnership who are not prepared to simply sit on the sidelines and complain about what needs to be done."

The partnership also sources funding for the programme, attracting grants from AirS, Sussex Police, local housing associations and both Horsham District and Billingshurst Parish Councils. Denise is now seeking more volunteers to help initiate and run activities.

She said: "It started partly because I have a teenage daughter and I was concerned that there wasn't enough locally for young people to do. We organised a questionnaire to all pupils 16 and under – they told us that they wanted somewhere to meet informally and that one of their top interests was live music.

"We also felt it was important to create opportunities to get youngsters involved and keep them busy helping out, building their confidence and getting them used to the world of work – which is how the Youth Enterprise Scheme was created. I'm so pleased that local businesses have been prepared to take them under their wing."

The role of Action in rural Sussex is to identify issues and respond to the needs of rural communities. AirS provides practical help to ensure villages across Sussex remain vibrant places in which to live and work.

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