

Sponsored by

BELBIN®**Short-listed finalists**

- Susanne Springer nominated by Mike Naylor, The Hyde Group
- Christine Charlwood nominated by Kaye Kean, Pfizer Ltd
- Graham Morley nominated by Alex Cowen, NG Bailey
- Dr Barbara Dexter, University of Derby
- Leslie Silverlock nominated by Marianne Brooker, The Yarn

WINNER LESLIE SILVERLOCK, THE YARN

Background

The Young Advisors Resource Network, the YARN is a new social enterprise aimed at providing advice on youth issues to agencies in the East of England. It raises awareness of the problems facing young people ensuring their voice is heard in all aspects of local decision-making.

The Yarn won the Best Not-For-Profit Initiative for 2007 and more about the background to its establishment can be read on page 13.

The initiative

As young consultants, YAs are tasked with showing organisations, committees and projects how best to involve young people and how to attract and maintain the interest of young people in the planning, management and the reviewing of community services and activities.

While many agencies, departments and local authorities express a commitment to engaging young people in their work, this is often limited in practice. YAs are positioned to bridge the gap between services and young people. This entails engaging with young people but also playing a key role in changing working practices and cultures within organisations to embed youth engagement and participation in their working practices and policy development.

The learning needs of individual YAs are assessed, monitored and addressed throughout the training programme through the structure of the local schemes. They are recruited through a workshop process – allowing the leads and mentors to assess the current level of ability, understanding and skill of the applicants.

Once recruited the mentors and leads run a local induction which precedes the first of the two residential sessions which make up the training. Each YA has their own mentor, allowing for one on one support during the development process.

The learning outcomes of the programme are very varied providing both an insight into the importance of youth engagement and the YAs role in social development along with the skills needed to develop other YAs. Key elements of the programme include: communication skills, problem solving, risk assessment, understanding self and others and developing action plans.



Leslie Silverlock (left) receives his award from David Bainbridge of Belbin Associates:

Results

Many of the stakeholders report that YA input to date has been very positive and valued. Young Advisors have a fundamental role in engaging other young people and also ensuring that strategies relevant to young people are accessible to young people, particularly in terms of language and design.

Having delivered powerful workshops and presentations for EnCams on their recent run of seminars on engagement, the YAs were given this feedback from the Community Development Co-ordinator at Ealing Council: "Having listened to you and spoken to you your team today, I believe Young Advisors should be mandatory within every Local Authority."

The winner

Leslie Silverlock wrote and developed this training programme. A former director of Crime Concern, a Neighbourhood Renewal Advisor for the Department for Communities and Local Government, a freelance trainer specialising in team work and group dynamics, Leslie was expelled from two schools for what we call anti-social behaviour today.

Leslie believes in empowering young people and giving them responsibility. The programme he has developed for the Yarn gives these young people, many of whom are already in trouble with the authorities, the self-esteem to work alongside key community stakeholders as paid professionals.

As YA, Marianne Brooker aged 15 described him: "Leslie's presented in front of 500 local authority managers in a surf shirt instead of a suit. Ask Leslie about nerves during a presentation and he'll demonstrate the therapeutic potential of breaking into a Rolling Stones song to focus attention. Leslie leads by example. His peers respect him because he knows regeneration, renewal, legislation. Young people respect him because at 62 he's still one of them."

What the judges say

The judges felt the train the trainer programme that was developed for the YAs was innovative, engaging and inspiring. There was good evaluation data with clear links to the cost benefit in the community. This programme has changed lives. ■