

# “Together we work; together we grow”

Very often, echoes of happy childhood memories play a large part in how a person's life and experience develops, and this was certainly the case when I was fortunate enough to spend an afternoon with Sergeant David Aynsley (pictured on page 20) of the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, and to hear about the extraordinary energy and devotion he has put into the development of the Community Dance Team in Camborne, Cornwall - the TR14ers.



David grew up in an Airforce environment – some of his earliest memories were fairly traumatic in Bahrain in the early 60's when the unexpected, such as being kidnapped by Arabs, was all too much a part of the dangers inherent in the culture.

But, arriving back in England to RAF Fairford and then Brize Norton – a different sort of childhood awaited him. *“In retrospect, looking back at the experience, there was always a natural expectation that there was plenty to occupy the children – when we moved to a different location, we never had to ask if there was a playground, Cub/Scout pack or youth club – it was just expected to be there. Station commanders knew that if families were to be kept together, and people focussed on work, then children had to be provided for. Another advantage was that there was always a ‘Mum’ around if the children needed advice or comforting”*

*“Of course there were some evils in this society, but the difference was that we had somewhere to go, and someone to be with to escape the difficulties. There were role models of people in the Forces who had won medals, and we were lost in our imagination. Families were often poor, but the provision of those sort of facilities more than made up for it. They were very happy times”*

Dave was later to join the Army and subsequently the Police Force – eventually finding himself living and working in Cornwall with a desire to work on patrol, - ‘walking the beat’ – because his own happy memories invited him to *“engage and look out for the small person”*.

Promotion inevitably happened with a 2 year stint in St Ives, and then came 3 years as a Patrol Sergeant in Camborne, one of the most deprived areas in Cornwall, with few community facilities to divert bad behaviour and ultimately crime. However, despite detection of 50% of the crimes they investigated, Dave noticed that this did not necessarily change

anyone's lives and he felt a bit disillusioned with the efforts being made.

He then applied to be the Neighbourhood Sergeant in Camborne. *“We had plenty of opportunity to engage with people, but noticed that we were not making proper relationships. However this was ‘our’ problem which we needed to address. The problems are never ‘out there’, but always ‘in here’ – we were just being visible, but the important thing was to notice what was going on around us. We needed to find ways of forming relationships with the locals – not just on the surface, but where we could understand where their needs lay”*

Once again, the memories of the provision for a safe and fulfilled childhood came back to Dave, and he was determined that the young people of Camborne should be able to experience some of this for themselves.

After attending meetings and courses, he organised his team, and they began to really focus into the main problems. Having lunch with the old people, art classes for the disabled, and going into the schools. *“You have to go to ‘the neck of the funnel’ to meet people – and that begins when you stand outside the school”*, he explained. *“Sounds basic, but it was an alien concept in Camborne. We felt uncomfortable, but we did it”*

Gradually the trust began to build – there was a uniqueness in what they did because of the Police involvement. Here were people in uniform with a reason to be there, not just to ‘stick their nose in’. *“Good manners is a massive key”*, explained Dave. *“Just because we had a uniform, it did not mean we could do as we liked – we had to have a reason to be there”*

From those small beginnings, amazingly creative things have happened. One of the most positive outcomes has been the creation of the TR14ers – a

police-led, community dance group based in Camborne ([www.tr14ers.co.uk](http://www.tr14ers.co.uk)), which provides a safe haven for vulnerable children and young people. The impact has been phenomenal – the dancing empowers children to take control of their own futures in a locality where they feel they have no control and little respect, and the results speak for themselves.

Dave explained how many of the young people have already emerged as leaders. He believes that some people already have that leadership quality inside them, and when a

space is created for them to be safe, explore themselves and their own ideas, this allows the leader to emerge. *“They explore themselves through dance and communication with other people – confidence grows and leadership emerges. For some, just having more confidence is enough”*

*“To allow this emergent leadership, there has to be really strong leadership in place already, which the Police provide. These young people then try to help others to develop as leaders – they are brave enough to disempower themselves in order to empower others”*.

*“What really means a lot to me is to see the smiley faces of young people whose backgrounds don't always have much to smile about. Then to see them move on to do things beyond their wildest dreams!”*

In some ways their lives are not very different to Dave's own childhood. There was deprivation in the RAF bases too, but the difference was in the provision of ways to occupy the children, within a strong set of rules which allowed the young people to feel safe.

**There is so much more to this inspiring story, so do watch out for Dave's book which is due out in the New Year – “Connecting with People” Kingsham Press – a reflective diary which attempts to draw some guidance from his own experience for its readers.**

Sargeant David Aynsley is an extraordinarily generous hearted man. His parting gift to me was this short sentence - *“if you want to engage – then make yourself engaging”* and he is certainly a person who lives that to the full.

**Interview by Vanessa Ascough - editor**