

I Power I International Anti-Bullying Festival for Young People 20th-21st November 2006

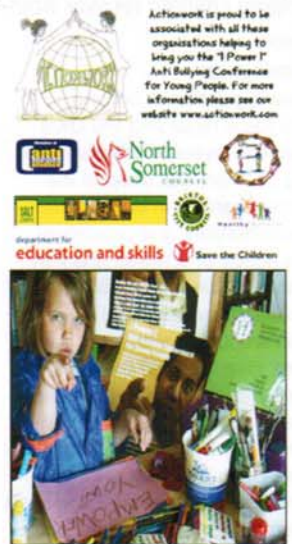
I was what you might call your average 11-year-old boy. Medium build, medium height, liked a bit of sport, was fit and healthy. I had a couple of close mates and was just starting to get interested in girls. One day after school, another student and his brother followed me, calling me names and kicking my school bag out of my hand. For no apparent reason I was being victimised every day by these boys. I started taking a different route home, which worked for a few days, but they got wise to this and started waiting for me, jumping out, pushing me, calling me names, asking for money, taking my bag, throwing it about, tripping me up and generally making fun of me. I just took it. I never gave them what they asked for. The only things they got from me were what they stole from my bag and my pockets. I also never told anyone about it. I kept quiet. I was not going to be called a snitch and I felt I could handle it myself. I felt that I was standing up to them, but in reality I was suffering. They knew it as well because they would laugh in my face, taunting me for not fighting back.

"One of them then pinned me to the ground and held a stinging nettle to my face. He poked the nettle in my eyes, over my cheeks and across my lips, taunting me while the other two just watched and laughed"

No one knew what I was going through, apart from these two boys. Not even my family guessed that something was wrong. One Sunday I cycled down to the local adventure playground, where I was suddenly confronted by three boys. One of them was the brother of the boy at school, the other two were his mates. They wanted my bike. I refused to give it to them. One of them punched me really hard in the mouth and knocked me to the ground (I lost one of my teeth). They started kicking me in the head and in the body. My head was covered in bruises and my face was stinging from the blows. They then stripped me naked, having to rip the clothes from me as I struggled. One of them then pinned me to the ground and held a stinging nettle to my face. They spat in my face and told me that if I told anyone I would die, then they rolled me, naked, down a hill that was covered thick with stinging nettles. I was in so much pain I could not scream, I could not cry, I could not talk. When I got home my mum went crazy, almost going to the police, but I would not say who had done it or where it had happened. I was no snitch.

Soon after that incident my mum took me, my brother and my sister to live in the rainforest in South East Asia with a tribe she was researching. In the two years that I spent there I never saw a single fight. The adults never forced young people to do things they did not want to do and no-one wanted anyone else to feel any kind of pain. They shared what they could with each other and always looked out for each other. This experience was very different to my experiences in Britain, and helped to mould my future. I experienced people living in peace and I experienced young people who were empowered and had a voice.

It is now my experience in Britain that young people are looking for real empowerment, which is not about holding a title or just being consulted. It is about acquiring skills, being given access to knowledge, and being able to participate as equal partners. Young people need to be able to judge their own empowerment on their own terms and within their own frameworks. They need opportunities to share experiences, to be heard and get a response, and to be able to take the initiative.



I Power I International Anti-Bullying Festival for Young People

Andy Hickson is the organiser of the I Power I International Anti-Bullying Festival for Young People, an annual event produced by young people with the support and supervision of adults. This year's festival will take place on 20-21 November at the Winter Gardens, Western-Super-Mare. The programme will include youth speakers, government ministers, anti-bullying practitioners, music, awards, films, workshops, exhibitions, special guests and celebrities.

For further information ring **01934 815163** or visit **www.bully.org**.