



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

– A DEDICATED TRAINING AND NETWORKING SESSION FROM BFFS

BFFS welcomed over 80 delegates from a wide range of film societies and community cinemas across the UK to a series of special training and networking sessions. **Community Connections** was designed to deliver practical advice and support, by and for film societies and community cinemas, on how to facilitate community outreach.

Session leader: Roger Drury. BFFS, Soundwork (SW Eng).
Panellists: Jennie Bennett. Otley Film Society (Yorks).
Neil Johns. Dulwich Paradiso Film Society (Ldn).
Carol McNeil. Oxen Park Cinema Club (NW Eng).

All about the presenters:

Roger Drury is a Board Member of BFFS and expert in Community Arts and Media. He set up the first screenings of independent film in the Forest of Dean, now established as part of the ongoing programme of two local cinemas. SOUNDWORK run a number of projects working with people of all ages and abilities using a range of media to link rural communities and the generations within them.

Otley Film Society was established with the aim of continuing the history of cinema in the local community of Otley, West Yorkshire. Its main screening venue, Otley Courthouse is a multipurpose arts and community centre run by and for local people. Not content with revitalising a local appetite for cinema the film society set up a screening programme that would actively include older people who were socially isolated. 'Golden Oldies' began life as an outreach project run by Otley Film Society but its popularity and success saw it evolve into an independent film club specifically for senior citizens. **Jennie Bennett** joined the panel to tell us how the film society breathed new life into cinema going in Otley.

Venue: Otley Courthouse
Projects on: DVD
Website: www.otleyfilmsociety.org.uk

Dulwich Paradiso is a well established and community run film society in East Dulwich, South London. The main screening venue is a pub, however, the forward thinking committee decided to branch out into the wider community and develop an innovative screening programme that would reach out to underserved audiences. Two audience strands were identified - children with autism and older people living in sheltered housing. **Neil Johns**, Secretary of the Film Society joined the panel to share his experiences of education and outreach from a film society perspective.

Venue: Multiple venues inc. pub, community centres, schools and sheltered housing schemes.
Projects on: DVD
Website: www.paradisofilm.co.uk

Oxen Park Cinema Club, winner of the Community Award at the BFFS Film Society of the Year Awards 2008 is a vital part of its small rural community in South Cumbria. Their community work includes a weekly children's film club, a dedicated filmmaking unit, newsreels about local people and places, animation workshops and extensive partnerships with local businesses including 'sponsor a film night'. The cinema club is a mobile one that shows films in the village halls of 5 local villages. **Carol McNeil**, Secretary of the OCC joined the panel to offer her perspective on a really rural cinema experience.

Venue: Multiple venues - local village halls.
Projects on: DVD

Website: www.oxenparkcinemaclub.org.uk

Audience questions:

- What are the key issues when working with vulnerable communities?
- How much do you involve children and young people in programming choices?
- What's the best way to attract and keep a teenage audience?
- How do you create demand in a community of wealthy, yet indifferent retirees?

Other more general questions included - tracking down copyright for little known films and advice on different types of screening licenses, such as blanket licences and title-by-title licences.

Top tips from the panel:

-Audience driven programming is central giving local people a sense of ownership and pride in the initiative. For example, if you want to involve a younger audience then be brave! Why not give the local 6th form college the opportunity to programme a film strand.

-Different programming choices can attract new audiences so consider doing something new, archive screenings may attract local history or community groups that might not otherwise attend your screenings.

-If at first you don't succeed... if a children's or young people film strand fails then try accessing the audience from a different angle. The film society alone may not be enough to draw in an audience but a collaboration, for example, with National School Films Week can prove mutually beneficial.

-Embed yourself in the local community media outlets e.g., not just the mainstream local press and radio to help you get the word out there, the higher your profile the more likely that community partners will seek you out and give you access to share what you are doing and why

-Commitment and trust are paramount when working with vulnerable people - you may be the expert on film but it's vital that you work closely with the support groups or local structure that is in place.

-Neil offered the example of building links to Sheltered Housing units- where often groups welcome visiting activity. He also mentioned finding access to local archives that can be screened as well as local projects which may be producing films about the local area as well as newsreels or oral history. He also talked about portability and budget kit, using projection outdoors to attract new audience/new activity. A showing in a park of Slumdog Millionaire drew 250 young people!!

-Do be ambitious but don't overreach yourself – think why do you want to do the project, what do you want to achieve, and how will you make it happen? Above all start small, try a single screening and if that works build slowly.

-If making an approach to a local business or new partner think carefully about what you can offer them as well as what they can offer you. For example, by joining a film society committee you're offering people the chance to broaden and develop their skill set.

-Community volunteer groups often lack the confidence to lobby for their needs or place a high enough value on their work – to avoid falling into this trap keep abreast of government initiatives on a local, regional and national level. Funding and other types of support may be available to support your initiative but you won't know if you don't ask.

-To attract new people why not team up with a local charity, hosting a charity screening in aid of a worthy cause could bring in a new and possibly wealthy audience. Once hooked on the benefits of a film club maybe you could persuade them to get involved in and bring a new outlook to yours.

-Learn from others – read the case studies on the BFFS website, if an initiative inspires you then get in touch with the volunteer organiser and steal all their good ideas, with their permission of course!

BFFS Training

This training session was held at the Showroom Cinema, Sheffield as part of the 2009 BFFS National Conference weekend for Community Cinemas. For more information on sector specific training and events visit the BFFS website www.bffs.org.uk or email info@bffs.org.uk.