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Home is where the art is

Coventry's young people took centre stage this weekend as Whitefriars Housing Group championed the work of local community groups and hailed the city's local heroes.

Hoodies and ASBOs might hit the headlines, but Whitefriars' third residents' conference highlighted the good done by youngsters in the city and gave a welcome boost to community groups.

Reformed graffiti artist Andrew Smith, who once caused thousands of pounds worth of damage across Coventry, was one of those who attended. The father-of-one helped young people produce a community-spirited piece of art.

Other groups promoting young people at the conference, which took place at the Britannia Hotel, Coventry, included the Shining Stars Cheerleaders, Mini Mick rappers, EST02, and the Urban Troopers, all from the People's Place Stoke Aldermoor.

Research shows that, far from being perpetrators of crime, teenagers are far more likely to be victims, and Shining Stars manager Sue Dalziel said she was grateful for the chance to champion the city's youngsters.

She said: "It went really well and the kids loved it. They got a real buzz out of performing. It was organised well and Whitefriars really showed its appreciation.

"The event helped the young and old come together and everyone got involved. I was so proud to be their manager."

The young people and tenants attending also got in gear with other activities including dance. An inspirational poem was read out by Earl Allen, of Willenhall, and a tenant who'd successfully established her own business also spoke to those attending.

On hand was Clive Gott, an internationally-renowned motivational speaker, who donated his time for free to put a spring in Coventry's step. His talk about his own childhood and the need to encourage young people and build self-esteem struck a cord with many in the audience.

He said: "The young people were inspirational. They were fantastic and I want to commend them for their courage in getting on the stage and showing us what they can do. With the right guidance and encouragement these young people will really get somewhere. What they showed us on Saturday morning, proves just how much potential they have to go on and achieve great things."

Lynn Hanson, customer involvement manager at Whitefriars, said: "All too often young people are portrayed as hoody-wearing, would-be vandals. The truth is far removed from this perceived reality and we are delighted to have shown just what young people can achieve with a little helping hand.

"There is so much work going on across Coventry, it is fantastic to take a moment to reflect on that."

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