

Making Community a 'favourite' for bookies' staff

Helping betting shop members to network with each other and build relationships with other supportive organisations, is paying dividends for Community's 'Safer Betting Shops' campaign.

Since last summer Community's organising department has continued to recruit hundreds of betting shop workers nationally and its ground-breaking 'Safer Betting Shops' campaign is growing stronger and gaining widespread support.

'It's taken time to get across the message but our members are spreading the word about our commitment to providing safe workplaces for all betting shop staff and the benefits of our union's support (see panel). Now non-members are coming to us, as well as us approaching them,' says Lesley- Anne Ure, who is deputising as Community's Head of Organising while Christine Hardacre is on maternity leave.

'With a growing membership we're building on our capacity to organise,' she adds. 'While bookmaking firms vary in how they treat their staff, most of their workers share common concerns – single staffing, safety, lack of consultation and representation. What we envisage is a national network of Community bookmaking reps skilled in dealing with those concerns.'

To achieve that, Community organisers are focusing on supporting betting shop staff to communicate with each other. 'Through our leaflets and betting shop websites they can keep up with developments around the country, and our regional forums are enabling them to share ideas and good practice so we can build a much stronger campaign,' says Lesley Anne.

After the success of Community's first national betting workers' forum in London in January, attended by Sports Minister Richard Caborn, other regional events have followed.

At Motherwell in March, guest speaker Ian Tasker, from the STUC, talked about the Scottish Executive's 'Bang Out of Order' Campaign and how this, together with Community, is getting the message across to employers that public abuse of their staff must end. Over the last month or so other regional forums have taken place in Regions 4, 7 and 8, and a second national forum is planned for November. To find out more, contact your local organiser (details at www.bookiesrights.com/campaign.html)

and Ladbrokes staff page at www.community-tu.org) or call freephone 0800 834 640.

As well as helping members to network, Community's organisers have been building a wider network of support by working with MPs, stakeholders in the industry and organisations focused on staff safety and working rights.

Perhaps the most significant of these has been the Early Day Motion put forward to Parliament in December, in which more than 90 MPs, headed by MP for Bassetlaw John Mann, called for an end to single staffing. But around the country, organisers have been forging useful connections that will further the campaign.

Regional organiser for Scotland and the North East Ian Telford attended the Retailers Against Crime Conference in Glasgow in March. 'More than 500 employers were there so it was a great opportunity to share ideas and tell them about our campaign.' Ian is also hoping to work with Strathclyde Police on setting up an early warning system in local betting shops. 'Since January there have been at least 60 robberies in bookies in Glasgow alone, so we want to do all we can to protect staff,' he explains.

Elsewhere in Region 2, organisers have been working closely with councillor Alan Smith and Community's West Coast Branch. 'Our members there have been helping us visit local Ladbrokes, Coral and Chas Kendal shops to spread the message about Community and gather information for our research, which feeds into our organising work and provides evidence to influence employers and decision-makers,' explains Ian Telford.

'It's been a busy time for all our organisers,' adds Lesley-Anne. 'But we can all see that progress is being made – betting shop staff are joining Community, potential members know who we are and the message about what we can do for them is getting through - Community is 'the union for betting shop workers'.

How we've helped

- ✓ Safety - Community intervened when BetFred shops nationwide switched off their emergency alarms putting staff's safety at risk. The result? All alarms were back on within days, protecting staff.
- ✓ Legal support - Union organisers got legal advice for Ladbrokes workers who were asked to produce their passports immediately to comply with immigration laws, or face disciplinary action. The result? Staff didn't have to hand over their passports or worry about the security of their personal details.
- ✓ Consultation - Community organisers sought legal help when contract changes at Coral and Ladbrokes were brought in with little effective consultation. The result? The union is continuing to provide legal support and encourage members to lodge grievances about the transparency of the consultation process.
- ✓ Single staffing - Community put pressure on Ladbrokes to review their single staffing arrangements. The result? The firm ended planned single staffing, reducing the risk of robbery and assault for their employees, and the union hopes Corals and BetFred will follow suit.

