



Friends of the Earth

PULLOUT

YOU'VE GOT THE POWER...

Taking it to the streets

Continuing the regular series of pullout features in *Change Your World*: four pages on how to run effective stalls and get your message to the people in the streets by Paul de Zylva, London Campaigns Co-ordinator.

Campaigning would not be the same without the good old street stall. Over the years, thousands of FOE Local Group volunteers have reached millions of people with their go green message just by setting up a stall on the street.

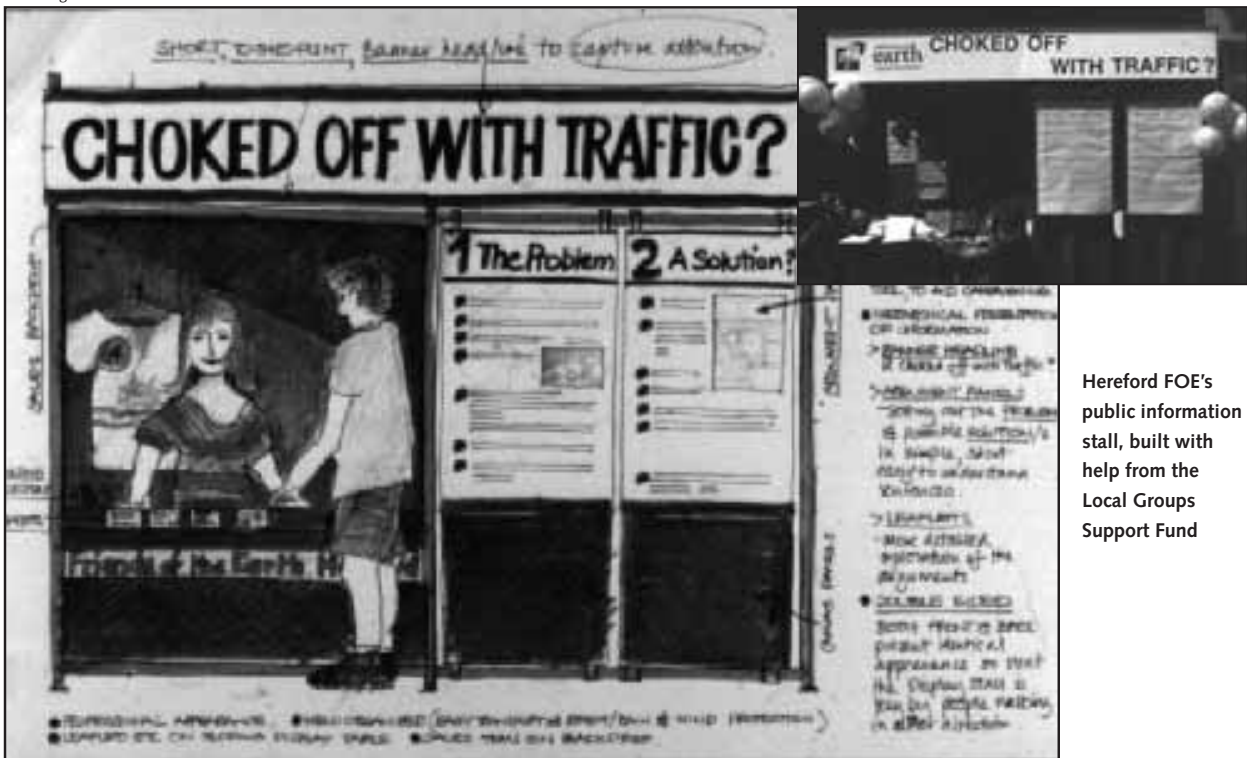
Running a stall gives you a visible presence and a chance to fundraise and recruit, as well as to enlist support for your main campaigns. But there's more to setting up a stall than just waiting for people to come to you. Whether you are on the street or at a special event such as a carnival, there will be plenty of distractions for the people you want to take notice of you and your campaign. The humble stall is one of

your best campaigning tools. This feature shows how to make the most of your time on the streets.

There's nothing worse than setting up a stall, sitting behind it and watching the people walk past. But every weekend, across Britain, people can be seen sitting behind a stall stacked with leaflets, waiting in vain for someone to take an interest. Most have a long wait.

It is far more effective to engage the public, by having something to say and making sure as many people as possible get to hear about it. Of course they don't capture the hearts and minds of every person who passes, that's impossible. But they do maximise their chances by following a few easy steps.

Paige Mitchell/FOE



Hereford FOE's public information stall, built with help from the Local Groups Support Fund

TAKE THE INITIATIVE

For a start, it's worth remembering that as much as being a prop, your stall can be off-putting. Standing or sitting behind your stall creates a barrier between you and the people you are trying to reach. It's okay to have one or two people behind the stall but try standing alongside the stall or a few yards away where you can engage the public. A good way to attract the public is by giving out leaflets and using a short, prepared "sales patter" about local environmental issues.

Quite often, you may notice at street stalls and fairs that many people peer at your stall but act as if they are afraid to take any leaflets for fear of ruining its appearance. Take the initiative and break the ice by encouraging people to take leaflets that are free and directing their attention to your petition/campaign. Use a few well-chosen opening lines to make people feel comfortable.

Get your patter right

Everyone involved in running your stall should be familiar with the main thrust of any special event or campaign message. They should also have a few opening words they can use to engage members of the public. This does not mean everyone has to have the charm of a compere or guile of a sales person – but you will need a few key lines that capture in a short space of time what you're doing and why you want this particular person to help.

Engaging people means getting them on your side or at least letting you tell them your position. In a busy high street or at an event, your task is to get people to say yes to taking leaflets, signing up or donating 50p. This means using the right opening lines. Confusing or naive openers like "Hello, will you help us stop climate change right now?" or "Hello we're Friends of the Earth, would you like to save the environment?" just won't work.

Avoid jargon

The trick is to drop out of campaign-speak and act 'normal'. So talking in code: "COP 4 is coming up and we're asking everyone to pledge to urge their MP to sign EDM 999 on CO₂ and emissions trading" is unlikely to get your message across. As with any form of campaigning you do not have to present yourself as an expert – the chances are that you will know more than enough to get your core message across. And while you will no doubt encounter self-appointed or even properly qualified 'experts', don't be afraid to say what you are – a concerned citizen volunteering your time.

Opening lines

Your opening lines are crucial. They take no time to say but have huge impact. They can stop people in their stride, change their impression of you (many people passing stalls think they know who and what you are but may later admit they thought you were something else). A concise, well-chosen opening will ease you into a dialogue with people and make them feel comfortable about stopping and spending their valuable time with you. Here are some examples:

- "Hello, what we're doing today is asking people to sign ... to help us with our campaign to clean up local air pollution. I'll give you a leaflet and there's lots more information on the stall you can take... will you sign?" This is positive, it says you have something for them and asks them to help. And it takes less than 10 seconds to say.
- "Hello, would you like to have a go on our Genetically Modified Game? It's over there on the stall, 20p a go and a free leaflet with every turn. Would you like a go?"

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

The least you can ask someone to do is to take a leaflet or sign a petition. Most people are entirely reasonable if presented with such simple and limited options. So if some people declare indifference or regale you with their solution to the world's problems, your best tactic is to 'close down' the options you give them and make it very simple: "We're just asking people to sign the petition and take a leaflet for more information." But you may still encounter a variety of characters who resist even the closed options you have given:

"It's all very well but nothing can be done"

Your reply: years of action by Friends of the Earth and other groups shows this is not the case. Give one example and encourage them to take a leaflet.

"The Government is doing its best"

Your reply: use one simple example to disprove this and show them a leaflet which backs you up.

"The world can only be saved by international spiritualism, a certain religion etc."

Your reply: in the meantime, everyday problems can be solved or relieved by personal action.

"Any environmental solutions are too expensive and unrealistic"

Your reply: give examples of where low cost environmental improvements (eg. insulating homes, making use of empty properties) are real world solutions.

"Yes it's important but what's in it for me personally?"

Your reply: everyone benefits from an improved and protected environment. For example: "The air is cleaner here because of our campaign to reduce traffic in the city".

Something for the kids

Always have something to keep the children happy – free stickers, inexpensive badges, a children's leaflet. It's always worth having FOE sticky badges left over from fundraising days to give to children as it often helps melt resistance from their parents.

Play games

However tough your campaign message or demands, you can help get the message across in subtle and humorous ways – ways that help convey the essence of your message without appearing too frightening or

bleak. For example, almost any campaign can be turned into a game which raises a smile as well as campaigning funds for your cause.

- Greenwich FOE ran a **"Spot the Genetically Modified Crop Trial"** game and raised over £40. It needed to be "sold" to draw people in but with a few carefully chosen

words and a smile, people took the plunge and "using their skill and judgement" tried to locate where the dastardly GM Company had sown its GM crops in the Great British Countryside (a square of chicken wire bent to shape (contours, hills, fields) covered in painted papier mache with small sticky labels folded over pins and numbered). The person closest at the end of the day won a prize. Everyone taking part was given a GM food leaflet.

- Hackney FOE collected some old carpet tiles and made a giant game of **Environment Snakes and Ladders**. Squares were marked "Recycle all my Bottles – move 2 spaces" or "Left the tap running when cleaning teeth – miss a turn." A large bouncy dice added to the fun.

Dealing with tricky customers

When you're out on the street campaigning a very small minority may see this as an invitation to attack you and what you stand for. You can expect to meet the person with their solutions to all the world's problems, the "nuclear power is safe and cheap" stalwart and the "Friends of the Earth, Enemy of the People" cynic. Avoid getting into protracted arguments or disagreements. Your aim is to get your concise message across, to raise your local group's profile (and a few pounds). You will not do this by getting into arguments or detailed technical analysis with people. The trick is to know when to let go

of the conversation. Do so politely, but firmly, and invite people with particular queries to contact you later. Give them your details. Stopping speaking is another simple tactic if problems persist.

And if you do get rude or hurtful comments hurled at you remember that they aren't usually aimed at you personally (after all, this person is likely to be a stranger).

It may be worth nominating one person as a 'diplomat', who will sweet talk or calm down particularly tricky people. But whatever you do, do not get into slanging matches. If there is a disturbance, get witnesses and report the matter to the police.

YOU'VE GOT THE POWER...

Tips to tempt the public

1. Get out from behind that stall - use the FOE poster set as a colourful backdrop for your stall.
2. Use your concise, jargon-free patter to get initial interest and to explain the one simple thing you want them to do (take a leaflet, sign a petition).
3. Maintain eye contact as much as possible.
4. Try to find common ground between you and whoever you are talking to. For example: "Do you live locally? What do you think of the traffic problems round here?"
5. Ask direct questions rather than making general statements. For example: "Do you know many people with breathing problems?" rather than "Lots of people here can't breathe properly because of the fumes." Although this may be true, it's not as direct as asking what they think.
6. Concentrate on what the person is saying or telling you - use that information to assess their interests and to take the conversation in the direction you want.
7. Use everyday language, not jargon.
8. Encourage people to take as much free information as possible and to contact you later for more help if necessary.
9. Thank people for stopping and for spending their time at your stall.

Leaflet and poster management

1. Check your stock of leaflets - especially membership and campaign literature - and keep them up to date. Ideally laminate some standard posters and leaflets so your stall can not be ruined by rain.
2. But do not use out of date materials - they could be misleading.
3. Use only a few at a time - keeping spares under the stall and restocking as needed.
4. Try to display some leaflets in stand-up dispensers.
5. Avoid cluttering your stall with too many leaflets - it will look confusing to the public.
6. Limit the number of campaign issues you have on display. If your main event is about nuclear matters, avoid confusing the picture by sticking up posters about recycling just because you have them.
7. Make sure everyone you speak to goes away with a membership leaflet and something about your main campaign.

Equipment checklist

1. Stall (pasting table or specially designed version)
2. Banner and FOE posters
3. Cloth to cover table top
4. Up-to-date campaign and membership leaflets
5. Collecting tins
6. Merchandise (pens, badges, stickers, T-shirts etc.)
7. Relevant petitions, clip boards and pens
8. Stickers or other child-friendly, low-cost items
9. A note book to record the details of people wanting more information

Remember the formalities

1. You do not normally need permission if you are in a public space. As long as you are not obstructing a public highway or a fire escape, you are unlikely to encounter problems.
2. You need permission if you want to set up on private property, like the inside of a shopping centre, otherwise you could be accused of trespass.
3. Don't block narrow gangways or public rights of way.
4. It can be worthwhile informing the police of your intentions - date, time, what you're doing.
5. Do move if you are asked to by the police.
6. To sell goods in the high street or on the public highway you need a Traders' License. But you can sell merchandise at special events such as fetes or carnivals if you are not on the public highway.
7. Collecting tins can be put on a stall but cannot be held out and/or rattled unless you have a collectors' licence for that day.
8. Organise a rota of people for the stall. Be sure to match new people with experienced volunteers.
9. You can get a Traders' License and a Collectors' Licence from your local authority.

SUMMING UP

Stalls are your opportunity to show people in the street what Friends of the Earth can do. It's also a chance to find out more about local concerns, raise money, gain new members and to have a regular activity for your local group. Running a stall may seem like common sense, but armed with these tips many difficulties can be avoided.