Making vandals pay

In South Australia, the local government is reviewing the laws governing graffiti and is trying to come up with ideas about how to punish young vandals more effectively. Currently, people under eighteen don't have to pay costs for any damage they cause and courts are very reluctant to send them to prison for what is considered a minor offence. Consequently, many young offenders escape punishment and go on to commit further crimes. The government has to find a solution, but isn't sure what that might be.

The police force in the area has suggested making offenders pay compensation. The idea is that if a young person spray-paints a wall, he or she will be responsible for the cleaning bill, and will have to pay it sooner or later. This plan gets round the problem that many young vandals aren't earning any money. They won't have to pay the compensation immediately. However, if they get a job or start claiming benefits, the government will subtract money from their income to cover the costs of cleaning up the walls they've vandalized.

While a majority of people in the community welcome the idea, there are some experts who aren't sure that it is either fair or practical. A legal advisor to the government is worried that it would be impossible to start subtracting money from people's wages unless the tax authority was involved, and this could prove costly and complicated. If the amount of money owed by the vandal was less than it cost to take the money out his or her pay packet, then what would be the point of forcing the offender to pay for the crime?

A spokesperson for youth support groups has also criticized the plan. She argues that a majority of young people who cover walls with graffiti won't be put off by being told to pay for their crime. In her opinion, young offenders commit these crimes because they are bored or angry with society, or because they are part of gangs, so they simply don't think of the consequences. As a result, she believes that introducing a payback scheme won't reduce the number of crimes. In contrast, she proposes a scheme in which vandals have to clean up their graffiti themselves and meet members of the public who have been affected by their vandalism. She argues that if we educate young people to understand the consequences of their actions, they will stop committing crimes.

The last word goes to one of the leading politicians in South Australia's government. He admits that the amount of graffiti is unlikely to go down if the government forces criminals to pay compensation. However, he points out that the cost to the tax payer of cleaning up graffiti is huge, and that forcing criminals to foot the bill has to be a good thing.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Read the text. Circle the correct answers.

1 The local government in South Australia wants to

2 The local police force is suggesting that vandals will

3 The police force's suggestion is

4 The spokesperson for youth support groups says that the best way to stop vandalism is to

5 According to the leading politician, the police's plan is a good idea because it will

LIVEWORKSHEETS

In December 2011, when sixteen-year-old Amelia Hempleman-Adams arrived at Heathrow Airport in London, journalists from all the major newspapers were waiting for her. She had just spent the last seventeen nights in the Antarctic, enduring snowstorms and temperatures as low as −50°C, and she had become the youngest person in the world to ski to the South Pole.

Amelia's remarkable long-distance trek to the pole had been planned by her father, David, an experienced explorer who was famous in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s for his record-breaking expeditions. In his career, he had walked to the North Pole by himself, with no support from any other people, and he had climbed to the top of the highest mountain on every continent in the world. However, skiing across the Antarctic to the South Pole with his teenage daughter and a small team of other skiers was the most challenging journey of his life, mostly because, as a parent, he was very worried about Amelia.

Amelia's preparation for the expedition was very thorough. She spent a lot of time trekking across the English countryside to get fit, and she camped in a large supermarket freezer warehouse to get used to the low temperatures. She also asked for advice from her two older sisters, both of whom had already been to the North Pole with their dad. In fact, famously, her sister Alicia had flown to the North Pole at the age of eight to be with her father at the end of one of his expeditions. As a result, she was the youngest person ever to visit the most northerly place on Earth.

During the expedition, Amelia carried two very special gifts in her bag. Before starting her adventure, she had met Alexandra Shackleton, the granddaughter of the polar explorer, Ernest Shackleton. Alexandra's grandfather had tried and failed to lead a team of brave adventurers to the South Pole in 1909, and she gave Amelia two gifts to remind the young girl of the amazing history of polar exploration. The first was a coin which had belonged to Ernest Shackleton. The second was a photograph of the famous explorer. Like so many early polar explorers, Ernest Shackleton, who never reached the South Pole in his career, had lost his life in the Antarctic. He had a heart attack during a scientific expedition in the 1920s.

When she returned from the expedition, Amelia said that she had enjoyed taking time out from school, and getting to know her father, but she had missed her friends and had found it difficult to deal with the freezing cold and the boring food. She also complained about her father's snoring. It hadn't been easy to sleep in a tent every night with her noisy dad.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

1. Where had Amelia Hempleman-Adams just returned from in December 2011?

2. Why was Amelia's father worried during the expedition?

3. How did Amelia prepare for the cold temperatures?

4. Who was the youngest person ever to visit the North Pole?

5. What gifts did Amelia receive from Alexandra Shackleton?

6. What did Amelia complain about after the expedition?

LIVEWORKSHEETS