

A pain in the ear

Brendan O'Neill

If you want to see the future of youth policing in Nova Scotia, look no further than the South Shore.

Police in East Chester have taken to blinding young people in an effort to move them on. Like something out of occupied Iraq, helicopters are shining super-bright halogen lights down in youngsters drinking in parks. The spotlight temporarily blinds those in its beam. Sergeant Gareth Starr says that it will be used “to move them on, as they don’t like the light shining in their faces”. Well, would you?

Now another youth policing idea is to be launched in nearby Bridgewater which will make those earlier antics look almost gentle by comparison. Lunenburg County police have purchased something called the Mosquito, described by the local press as an “anti-youth gadget” which will be placed in the Bridgewater Mall shopping area. The Mosquito emits a noise that carries over a distance of roughly 20 metres and which to most of us registers as a faint buzz. To people under 20, however, it is apparently so high pitched, so piercing and so unbearable (though harmless) that they can’t remain in the earshot. They are literally screeched off the streets.

“I’ve heard it is like the noise made by a dog whistle,” says Terry Crees, the anti-social behaviour co-ordinator for the Lunenburg County police. “It is sad that we have got to use equipment of this nature,” he admits. “But we’re using it

against a minority of young people who make life miserable for the majority.”

Yet the Mosquito will buzz in the ears of all young people under the age of 20- including those just going to the store or walking to school and not just in the those of an apparently unruly minority.

Gully Haye, manager of the Dollarama in the Bridgewater Mall where the Mosquito will be tested, tells a different story. Yes, “young people” hang around outside his store, but mostly they just kick a ball against a wall. “It’s pretty minor,” he says. We’re trying to get the local community centre opened, where they could play, but is always seems to be locked up.”

The launch of the Mosquito sums up the fear and hatred that is driving policing on young people. We seem scared of our own youth imagining that “hoodies” are dragging society down. We’re so scared, in fact, that we use rough methods to police them: we use cameras to monitor their behaviour, we blind them from a distance, and now employ machines to screech at them in the hopes they will just go away. With no idea what to say to them-how to inspire or socialise them- we seek to disperse, disperse, disperse. It will only make them feel more like outsiders.