



investing in children

**Report of  
Sexual Health Agenda Days  
held in Trimdon and Newton Aycliffe  
August 2004**

## Sexual Health Agenda Day for Young People

A group of young people were asked by 'Investing In Children' to organise two Health Agenda Days. One in the Trimdons and the other in Newton Aycliffe. The focus of the day was to gather as much information as possible about where young people feel comfortable going for Sexual Health Education/Issues/Advice, what worked well and what could be improved upon.

It was decided after talking to approx. twenty young people that the best venue for the event in the Trimdons would be the Village Hall. Publicity around the event was organised and distributed in the other two Trimdons. To identify young people in Newton Aycliffe we asked a youth worker for support to help list young people who might like to be involved. The venue in Aycliffe was the new youth club in the town centre. A letter of invitation was also sent to four young people from 'West Ward' in Aycliffe.

As both events were to be held during the school holidays, the young people asked for the event to be held on weekdays rather than a weekend.

The target age group was 12 to 16 year olds; the average age group that attended on both days was 15 year old. Also there were eight young people aged from 12 to 13 years old who took part in the event in the Trimdons but who didn't want to be with the older young people. They had an event themselves before the organised Agenda Days. Three young people involved had learning disabilities.

On both Agenda Days, there were five tables in the room with four seats around them. Each table had one of the five questions on it with paper and pens for the young people to use. All participants were asked to move from table to table so that they could put down their thoughts and experiences. By using this model the young people felt in control and under no pressure to answer any of the questions they may have found embarrassing. It was felt that more information was gathered from the young people by using open questions rather than closed questions i.e. in the form of a questionnaire.

These were the questions that the young people answered on the day:

**1. What do you think about sex education in your school?**

In both areas, most young people said there was a lack of information in schools and not enough sex education.

*“Sex education does not exist in my school.”*

*“The sex education is not very good because we know all the stuff they tell us”*

A few young people said that no one listened to the teacher and that every one just carried on.

*“They don’t learn you anything because everyone runs amok”*

The minority of young people thought sex education in school was good or ok.

*“It was good”*

*“It was alright because I understood it well.”*

**2. How do you feel asking your parents/carers about issues around sex?**

A lot of young people felt they could approach either one or both of their parents for advice about sex.

*“I would ask my mam”*

*“I feel alright about asking my mam or dad about issues around sex because they are very laid back”*

One person would rather go to their sister for advice.

*“I would rather talk to my eldest sister because I know she would tell me everything”*

Some young people felt they could not talk to their parents but suggested either a Connexions advisor or Trimdon House.

*“I wouldn’t ask my dad ‘coz he gets embarrassed and walks out of the room whenever we talk about sex!”*

*“Trimdon House answers all my questions”*

*“If I felt too embarrassed I would go for some advice at Trimdon House or Connexions.”*

**3. If you could not ask parents/carers about sexual issues who would you prefer to ask?**

The majority of young people in the Trimdons would prefer to go to the young persons’ health drop-in at Trimdon House if they could not approach their parents/carers.

*“For professional advice I would go to Trimdon House”*

Many young people would ask their friends or other family members for advice if they could not ask parents or carers.

*“Other members of the family and close friends”*

A lot of people would go to their local young persons’ clinic for advice.

*“The clinic gives confidential help in emergency situations”*

*“The clinic is our only option living in Newton Aycliffe as we can’t afford bus fares to go to hospitals.”*

Very few people would go to their teachers or GPs for advice because they felt there was a lack of trust for them.

*“At school there isn’t always people you can trust to talk to,”*

*“School is difficult to talk to as you feel it could get back to parents or other teachers”*

*“The doctors help give medical advice, but sometimes at our age you feel like they may tell parents.”*

A couple of young people said they would not know where else to go for advice nor whether a young persons’ clinic existed in their area.

*“I don’t know who I would ask.”*

#### **4. What do you think about sex education services provided?**

**E.g.**

- ***Doctor’s surgery***
- ***Health Clinic***
- ***Teen Clinic at Trimdon House***
- ***Or any others you know***

There were mixed feelings about the services provided at school in both areas.

*“In my whole 12 years at school I have had one sex education lesson, which was mainly about personal hygiene rather than sex.”*

*“It was clear what I learnt at school”*

*“We don’t get enough of it at school”*

*“School nurse”*

The majority of young people in the Trimdons think that Trimdon House provides a good sexual health service although one person said there should be more advertisements for it.

A few people said that there were not enough services available for young people and that the school services that were available were boring and uninformative.

*“They are not very good”*

*“Boring and don’t learn you nowt”*

*“The sex education lessons are crap and they don’t give enough information.”*

There are mixed feelings about the services provided by the GP.

*“There is a wide variety of information that can be taught or retrieved from any doctors or clinics”*

*“I don’t feel happy talking to my doctor”*

**5. Where would you go for advice about sex or any other issue that concerned you?**

An overwhelming majority of young people said they would go to the local clinic in Aycliffe or Trimdon House in Trimdon for any advice, as well as using other services.

*“To Trimdon House, the school nurse, my big brothers and my foster parents.”*

*“Trimdon House, Doctor, Sedgefield Clinic”*

*“I would go to the clinic or the hospital”*

*“Either the clinic because it’s confidential or my sister”*

Other services/places/people mentioned were Orbit 20 in Spennymoor, boyfriends and girlfriends, siblings and cousins, youth workers, friends, Connexions, the school nurse and teachers.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

The 3-day events proved very successful. Sufficient information was obtained and the young people seemed to be happy with the way the day was organised. 36 out of the 38 young people that took part felt able to answer all questions in the format chosen. It was also important that the opinions of the young people with learning disabilities were as valued as all the opinions of the other participants.

One of the main reasons why the day was such a huge success was due to the agenda of the event being created by young people, for example the questions, the layout of the chairs and tables and the choice of refreshments. The facilitators on the day were also young people.

The venues in the three areas were well chosen as they were spacious and provided a comfortable atmosphere for the young people. All young people were given £10 for taking part in the event and this made them feel valued and respected.

Many young people also felt that they could approach their parents and other relatives to ask for support and advice. However one reason why some didn't do so was not that they couldn't get the right information, it was more that once they reached the age of 14, 15 or 16, they were too embarrassed to bring up the subject of sex at home. The young people with learning disabilities didn't appear to suffer from embarrassment as all said they would ask their carers. A lot of girls felt they could confide in their mums if they had any worries but wouldn't ask their mums for sexual health information due to the problem again of embarrassment.

Our initial research showed that schools might not be the best places to deliver sex education. We think this might be an area for further research.

Places like Trimdon House are seen as good sources of information for young people but it had been suggested that more services should be available there, i.e. pregnancy testing, contraceptive pill provision and S.T.I testing.

More resources should be provided to drop-ins that are in local communities as young people have identified transport as a major problem when accessing health services. Many young people also prefer to go to places for advice anonymously and have their concerns dealt with confidentially.

The response from most young people we met was that there should be more events like this held in the future, as it was apparent that it was a very good way of focussing on the issues raised.

We agreed to that all young people involved in the event should be provided with a copy of the final agenda days report and have an opportunity to receive feedback on the conclusions and recommendations made.

### **Next Steps**

As the two events gave only a brief insight into young people's thoughts we agreed that a young people's research team be setup to research the following issues -

- The role of parents and relatives as educators.
- The problems around sex education in schools.
- The barriers young people experience when accessing sexual health services.

This report was written by Holly Brookes (*aged 18*)  
(with the help of young people that attended the health events)

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