

INVESTING IN CHILDREN

Membership Evaluation

Date June 2005

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| PROJECT NAME | Benwell Junior Youth Inclusion Project |
| PROJECT LOCATION | Dolphin Street Community Centre Dolphin Street, Benwell Newcastle upon Tyne NE4 8AZ |
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SUMMARY OF EVALUATION

This is Children's Fund project (known as Plus Project) to work with young people aged 8 – 13 at risk of offending. The project includes lots of activities from rowing to youth club to lads and dads to group discussions. Although Project Plus has a commitment to working with 30 children they are actually involved with about 75 young people a week. The timetable of projects was reshaped by the group with the aim of including young people as much as possible. There is now a planning group (suggested by two of the young people) which meets every Monday to plan and direct the activities they want to do "They get kids involved and the ideas come from the kids". Another example of how the young people are involved in decisions is the Key Fund group which is a small group who discuss how to solve problems together, plan activities and are encouraged to take decisions on an equal basis.

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| Sector | Youth Provision |
| Ages | 8-13 years |
| Area | West |
| Ward | Elswick |

Number of beneficiaries 75



Evaluation for Investing in Children membership:

Benwell Junior Youth Inclusion Project

Introduction

The Benwell Junior YIP, known locally as the Plus Project was set up as a pilot project around 12 months ago by the Children's Fund to work with young people aged 8 to 13, who are identified as being most at risk of offending. Maxine Gribben, a children and families support worker at the project had been nominated for and attended the Investing in Children Staff Development days in November 2004. In a follow up mentoring session it was identified that Benwell Junior YIP may be a suitable candidate for membership.

Background

I met with Joanne, Vicky and Maxine, workers from the project who explained both the work they are involved in and how the project has evolved. When the team came together they set about building up the project to provide services to meet its core remit but on a basis that will reflect the needs of young people in North Benwell and will include them in the decision making process. The service is funded through the Children's Fund rather than the Youth Justice Board and the staff at the project decided to use the greater flexibility this gives them to broaden out the range of activities they would normally get involved in. They also decided to involve the children and young people they work with in drawing up a new timetable of activities. A schedule of the services activities is attached.

The project has a commitment to work with the 30 most at risk individuals identified by the Education Welfare Service, Social Services, local schools and health services, other community groups, the Youth Offending Team and the Children's Fund. This does not prevent young people who become interested in some of the activities coming along and joining in and members of groups can bring friends along with them. At the moment they are working with 75 young people a week and being known as the Plus Project helps to take away the stigma for young people being involved with the Youth Justice system.

The area covered is North Benwell and the team started out by doing sessional work in both the local primary schools. The children at these sessions asked if they could have a youth club, which the project has set up for them. All the young people who attended the club were self-referrals. This in turn led on to a partnership with the local Centre for Sport doing rowing activities and the Education Welfare Service doing some work on bullying. From these activities it was decided to reshape the projects timetable to involve the young people as much as possible. Good working relationships were built up with the young people and it was felt that the project could develop along with the young people and be shaped by them.

A young persons Planning Group was then formed which meets every Monday evening, facilitated by Vicky and Joanne.

Evidence for dialogue and change

The team work with a large number of young people in different settings and with different goals although the overall remit is social inclusion. To seek the views of young people on how successful the project is in listening to what they have to say and acting upon it I met with the Junior Key Fund Group at Atkinson Road Primary School and with the Benwell YIP Planning Group who meet at the Dolphin Street Community Centre.

Junior Key Fund

I sat in on a session facilitated by Joanne and Lee and was introduced to Anthony, Kiru, Joss and Andrew. The aim of the group is to help each other with problems they encounter in school and to gain confidence to find solutions to these problems. Members are free to leave the group if they wish to. As well as discussion about successes and difficulties the group plan activities and trips away. They have already been to Metroland and Laser Quasar and are producing an exhibition of their work to be displayed to the whole school. As a result of the work they have produced the Junior Key Fund rewards them with a trip of their choosing. They are planning a trip to Ruperts Wood in Northumberland and are engaged in drawing up lists of requirements and are working together and taking responsibility for the success of the trip.

The children obviously relished the opportunity the group gave to have their opinions listened to on an equal basis and to be able to take decisions and responsibility for their own behaviour and actions within the group. Joss told me that he “used to get really upset when I got angry” and that the group had all learnt to control their tempers when they got angry. The group had all experienced problems with one particular teacher and decided to invite her to a meeting of the group where the problems were resolved. The boys told me that without the group they felt these problems would have continued. Andrew told me that the best thing for him was “getting the chance to talk about things”. Both Kiru and Andrew told me that the best thing about the group was that it helped them solve problems. I explained the membership criteria to them and they said that they supported the application based on their experience of working with the project.

Planning Group

Two young people, Laura and Toni Michelle, who had been attending the Youth Club, founded the Planning Group. They had been coming up with lots of ideas for activities and events and it was decided to put a group together with young people from across the range of Benwell YIP projects so that young people themselves could plan and direct the activities they want to get involved in. The group has only been going for three weeks and is facilitated by Joanne, a youth worker from the project. Toni Michelle told me that she enjoys the idea of planning the activities themselves rather than have a youth worker come in and tell them what they are going to do. Laura confirmed that the ideas they come up with are discussed with Joanne in a genuine two way dialogue and that she enjoys this process. Both believe the project should receive membership as Toni Michelle says, “Its got kids involved (*in the decision making process*) and the ideas come from the kids.”

Conclusion

Benwell YIP is actively involved with seeking the views of children and young people in shaping the way they deliver their service. In the two examples I witnessed there was ample opportunity for the children to direct the work that they got involved in through discussion and debate with the staff of the project. I would like to recommend that Benwell YIP be awarded Investing in Children membership.

Activities

As a result of the restructuring of the timetable to reflect the wishes of the project users the following activities are provided.

Monday: - Evening. Planning Group. At the moment the group is planning activities and trips for the summer holidays and looking at how to involve young people from other groups in the planning process.

Evening. Older lads group. This group was set up in response to a request from some of the older lads to have some time that was their own away from the younger ones. The group is informal and is a chance to play pool, darts and chat to the workers about any subject if they wish.

Tuesday: - A.M. Group work at Cannon Street Primary. A group have called themselves the Awesome Foursome (now 5) They are all 7 – 8 year olds looking at friendship issues, difficult peer groups and have had the idea of putting on an exhibition of their work. These are children who would normally be in the spotlight for the wrong reasons.

P.M. Vicky and Joanne do group work. Maxine 1:1

Evening. Rowing at Newburn rowing club. This idea came directly from the young people.

Wednesday: - Four older girls 14 – 16 who had been coming along to the Youth Club but were now too old wanted to find a way that they could remain involved with the project. They have linked up with the Senior YIP and are working with the younger ones. This work will lead to the award of an early level NVQ. At the moment they are planning a residential for 8 children.

Thursday: - A.M. Parent Involvement Programme which is hoping to link in with the Planning Group.

P.M. Cannon St. and Atkinson Rd Schools. 1:1 and group work

Early evening. Community Centre. Craft Group. 4.00 – 5.30
Youth Club 5.30 – 7/7.30 for 20 to 30 young people. Pool, games, art, cook tea, have had sessions on bullying. The young people are planning a disco with staff support.

Friday: - Atkinson Road Primary. Junior Key Fund. Group of 5 young people from year 6 referred by EWO. The group discuss issues relevant to their lives while producing work, which will eventually go in to an exhibition. As a reward for this work the Key Fund finances activities and trips, which the group plan and organise themselves. A second Key fund group has been set up and are working towards going camping in the summer

P.M. 1.00 to 3.00 Dads and lads Group

Other Activities include;

Sports Hall Athletic. In partnership with the Community Development Team the project are taking 12 young people between the ages of 10 and 12 to Leicester to compete in a nationwide sports tournament This was open to all and is not based on sporting aptitude or ability.

Park Regeneration. A group of young people are working with the Park Redevelopment Forum. See attached sheet.

Graham Bristow
Investing in Children Project Worker
May 2005

Plus points for Benwell

The Benwell Junior Youth Inclusion Project (YIP) – the Plus Project – works with eight to 13 year olds at risk of offending. Though many are referred to this Children’s Fund project by schools, health services and other bodies, any interested young person can get involved – and around 75 are joining in every week. The Plus Project name removes the stigma associated with the youth justice system.

Local primary school children asked at the outset for the project to set up a youth club, and all those attending the club referred themselves. Now, the children and young people are involved in drawing up the timetable of activities and shaping the project, through a weekly planning group set up by two of the young people, Laura and Toni Michelle. The group involves people from across the range of Benwell YIP projects. Toni Michelle thinks it’s important that they plan their own activities, rather than a youth worker telling them what they are going to do, “It’s got kids involved [in the decision-making process] and the ideas come from the kids.”

Some of those activities include:

- an older lads’ group, where older boys have their own time away from the younger ones, playing pool and darts, or chatting to staff
- investigating issues around friendship and peer pressure
- older girls teaming up with staff to work with younger children and gain qualifications
- arts, crafts and sports, including rowing
- a dads and lads group
- work on regenerating a park.

A junior key fund has been set up for young people to help each other deal with problems they encounter in school. The group also plans activities and trips, drawing up lists of requirements and taking responsibility for the success of outings. The children relish the opportunity to have their opinions listened to, to take decisions and be responsible for their own behaviour.

Joss says, “I used to get really upset when I got angry,” and that everyone in the group has learned to control their tempers. All had problems with one particular teacher and decided to invite her to a meeting of the group where the problems were resolved. The boys say that without the group such problems would continue. Andrew adds that the best thing for him is, “getting the chance to talk about things”.

The Investing in Children assessor says, “At Benwell YIP there is ample opportunity for children to direct the work they get involved in through discussion and debate with the staff.”

“...I used to get really upset when I got angry...”

[suggested pics – older girls with younger children, dads and lads group)