



Evaluation for Investing in Children membership

Stockton Parent Support

Stockton Parent Support (SPS) is a registered charity for families and special needs groups. It offers information, support, activities, participation and volunteering. Its aims are:

- To provide practical support and information
- To promote and develop parent/ carer ideas for improving services and opportunities for disabled children in Stockton
- To provide activities that enable mainstream and disabled children and young people to work and achieve together
- To promote the participation of parent / carer and disabled children and young people in the community
- To enable a disabled child to access local sporting or leisure activities

There are many areas where young people are involved in decision making for SPS from activities that the young people do, right through to more strategic decisions about how SPS works, including the people who are employed there.

All of the groups of young people that SPS work with were more than happy to talk to me about what happens and what they get involved in. Due to this I felt that it was only fair to involve and record some comments from as many young people as wanted to talk to me. Therefore, I make no apologies for the length of this report to demonstrate the enthusiasm of all the young people that I spoke to during the process of this new application for Membership.

Drama Group

On 7th June 2007 I spoke to 3 groups of lively and enthusiastic young people at Bishopgarth School Harrowgate Lane in Stockton. They are part of Stockton Parent Support and are involved in drama work. Each group is putting together its own performance which will be staged in July.

The young people from all groups spoke about how they are involved in decision making from what performances they do, including how they organise them from casting to costumes; how to spend any funding they get; what refreshments they have at break times; what other activities they can do, including trips. The young people also told me they have rules for arts and drama development which the young people can add or delete rules. The drama groups got an £80 award for the work they do and decided to spend it on a party.

The first group were the Charlie Group and are Wayne, Matthew, Natasha, Grace, Amy, Katie and Jake. The young people were supported by a volunteer Alison.

- Amy – “We had choice of comedy, documentary, sci-fi, horror, music, romance, action or animation. We had a vote on what we do. We have chosen to do Willy Wonka and the Horror Factory.”

- Wayne – “We talk about what we do.”
- Jake – “The staff are nice to us.”
- Grace – “We decide what food and drinks we want.”
- Matthew – “We got money - £80 – we chose what we wanted to spend it on – we voted (the young people came up with 3 options to hold a vote on). We have a vote on everything.
- Natasha – “Rules are boring – but sometimes we do them by quizzes and games.”
- Katie – “We all decide what rules we want. We need rules to work.”

The second group were doing a thriller production about zombies. The young people in this group are Emma B, Courtney, Emma J, Robert, James, and Grant. The group were supported by 2 volunteers Sarah and Amelia.

- Robert – “It’s a kids’ drama – we make our own script, design the cast, and technical stuff. All the different groups have their own theme.”
- Courtney – “Choose sound, costumes etc.”
- Emma J – “We are having a party next week. We all had a vote. We picked 3 choices then voted. We get a sheet to say what we want to improve.”
- Grant – “Next week we are drawing.”
- James – “Like drawing and other things.”
- Emma B – “They act on improvements.”
- Daniel – “Would like to go into a different room to work where (we are) not disturbed.”

The third group I spoke to told me they were doing an action comedy based on the Rocky films. The group comprises Jordan, Andrew, Danny, Chantel and Sophie. They were supported by volunteers Katie and Emma.

- Jordan – “We are doing an action comedy based on Rocky with mixed up characters.”
- Sophie – “We did Scrooge before and got an award and money from Shevralty Awards.”
- Danny – “We got together and chose how to spend the money. We chose a party at Wynyard Pub.”
- Chantel – “Work is in progress.”
- Andrew – “There are lots of options. Sports ability group, Disco on Saturday night. We get on with the staff and they are not strict.”

The young people in this group said that they are all included and they all just get on and socialise. They make decisions with adults and feel treated the same as adults. Danny said its “Equal opportunities for all.” The young people in this group also told me that they had done additional activities in half term holidays which had been decided by young people. The young people also are integral to any fundraising and write articles for the newsletter. They are involved in Youth Disability Forum “where older people are there”, but young people are invited to give their views. They have been part of the parade at the Stockton Riverside Festival and said they feel ok about being in the parade.

SPS – Shadow Committee

On 11th June I visited Shadow Committee for Stockton Parents Support. I spoke to the following enthusiastic young people: Samia, Leeann, Emma and Lee. The young people told me about the work of the Shadow Committee and their supporting role of other young people in other groups of Stockton Parents Support.

- Samia – “Shadow Committee go out to activities and ask opinions of young people because some young people don’t like to tell adults when something is wrong.”

- Leeann – “Sometimes the young people do open up to us.”
- Lee – “I have lots of first hand experiences of supporting young people. Young people trust us and don’t always open up to adults. Happy to help others and it had helped build my confidence. I supported Michael* and vice versa.”

*Michael was a positive and energetic young man whom everyone thought a lot of, but who sadly died. The young people have now dedicated an award ceremony in his memory – called the MB Awards – and it’s the young people who decide who gets the award each time.

The Shadow Committee is currently working on changing the SPS volunteer training pack and staff handbook.

- Samia – “We are working on the voluntary training pack so it’s easier for those with learning difficulties to do. This group are being trained with the handbook so we are all becoming volunteers.”

I asked the young people what they thought could be improved about the Shadow Committee or Stockton Parents Support in general.

- Samia – “Nothing really. I haven’t been to any activities yet to talk to young people. But I know Ruth, Jenny and Sarah quite well and they do listen to what young people want.”
- Lee – “No improvements. We try and help resolve problems for young people. This group is more a sociable than working group even though we are doing training pack we have a laugh.”
- Emma – “Its not hard work, I enjoy it. It has helped me get more confidence.”
- Leeann – “Yeah it’s good.”
- Samia – “Got to know the adults and young people a little bit better because we have to talk to both. We talk to the young people about activities and changes they want and feed that back to the adult staff and volunteers.”
- Lee – “Young people in drama groups come to talk to us about problems. When there are problems the adults always try and resolve it and make it right for everyone.”

I asked about the staff.

- Samia – “Ruth’s good with the kids she is always positive and enthusiastic whatever she does. And Sarah B is good with the kids. The staff are like big kids.”
- Leeann – “I only know Sarah and Ruth but they are good.”
- Lee – “Know all the staff really well. If you are stuck they will help you. They support you and would even give you a lift if you needed it.”

At the beginning of the session I had explained what the Investing in Children Membership Award was about and so we ended by asking the young people if they thought that Stockton Parent Support deserved to get it.

- Samia – “I think it should.”
- Leeann – “I agree with Samia.
- Emma – “Yes!”
- Lee – “I think they should have had it even before now, because of everything that SPS has done. And most young people would say the same.”

We finished off by watching Lee’s Powerpoint Presentation that he was doing as part of his college course and based on the work of SPS. It was really useful for me as a summary of all the work they get involved in.

SPS Disability Forum

On 14th June I visited the SPS Disability Forum. I spoke to the following 3 young people: Rachel, Danny and Sean, who were extremely articulate in telling me about the work of the Disability Forum and other work of SPS. Due to this I left the discussion open just asking the young people to tell me what happens.

- Rachel – “I’ve been on the forum 2 years and it’s made up of adults and young people. We all have our own issues and raise topics. Adults are just there to support in case young people want help getting their points across. If the adults talk too much we have a yellow and red card system. They get a warning (yellow) at first then they have to stop or leave if they get a red card. But we don’t have to use it much now.”
- Sean – “Lee (another young person I met at Shadow Committee) runs the forum as chair and we are all happy with that. Agenda is a set one but we all get a chance to raise topics throughout or at end. I’m happy with meeting, it’s informal and no pressure as everyone gets to speak.”
- Danny – “It’s class we meet in different places such as Pizza Hut.”
- Rachel – “We got an award of £80 from MB awards so spent half of that on going to Pizza Hut and we still had meeting.”
- Danny – “It will get brought up at next meeting how to spend the other £40.”
- Rachel – “We started to look at access in Unis cos a lot of young people in the SPS groups will be applying soon. We got in touch with Universities and visited to see how they operate normally, not on just an open day.”
- Sean – “We say problems we have being disabled such as buses – there is only one I can get to college and there should be more.”
- Rachel – “We feed our issues to Youth Forum which has direct link to Stockton Council. I feel like we are making a difference, some people can’t speak up for themselves.”

The young people told me about their relationship with the SPS staff.

- Danny – “You can’t match Jenny she is great. Ruth is great too to support us. They don’t order us about it’s more relaxed. You can bring anything up.”
- Sean – “I’ve known them (the staff) a lot of years. No restrictions. Anything we bring up is relevant.”
- Rachel – “More like friends you can talk about anything and they keep your confidence. They want us to feel comfortable talking to them. We all help each other both adults and young people.”

The young people didn’t feel like much needed to be improved with their current way of working.

- Danny – “We have young people 11+ on group. I don’t think we would want anyone younger at moment.”
- Sean – “At moment 15 or 16 is youngest on group and mostly come from the drama groups.”
- Rachel – “We did the MB award ceremony. We commend people’s progress so there’s not just one winner.”
- Danny – “Mikey was our main voice. There are no losers and everyone is a winner. We sent forms to everyone in SPS to decide who gets an award.”
- Sean – “The adults are willing to get you to meetings because they remind you by text and email before all meetings.”
- Rachel – “It’s a youth forum and not an adult forum, they really want young people there.”
- Danny – “There are 8 on forum and that’s good cos it’s a little group!”

- Rachel – “It’s all fluent.”
- Danny – “All free between us – don’t have to feel we can’t say anything.”
- Rachel – “I’d recruit more girls.”
- Danny – “Need a bigger group.”
- Sean – “Good thing for a bigger group.”
- Danny – “Just about team work.”

Conclusion

The 25 young people in all the groups I met were very much expressing the same messages about SPS. The young people have a really good working relationship with the staff and adult volunteers and the young people feel like its one big team working towards the same goals. The young people feel respected and that their opinions, whatever they may be, are valued, taken on board and acted upon.

It was difficult to find out from young people anything that they would improve at the moment, as they appear to tackle issues as they arise. As for young people who may have problems talking to the adults, there is a mechanism also in place via the Shadow Committee for young people to provide peer support. The main issues were that some young people found deciding on the rules a bit boring and that the Disability Forum should have a bigger group of young people and in particular more girls.

The atmosphere at all of the sessions was very positive. A general observation of how the adults and young people interact appears to be relaxed and friendly and the young people are shown respect and valued as individuals.

A few examples of dialogue and change

| Issue | Change |
|---|--|
| Rules for young people involved in drama development. They are not always appropriate especially when new members join. | The young people look at the rules at the beginning of each session and can add, change or delete any rules. |
| Spending of any money awarded. | The young people discuss possibilities for spending the money, from which they agree a shortlist so that everyone can vote on. |
| Young people had issues with SPS and activities and didn’t always like to tell the adults. | The Shadow Committee of young people was set up so that young people could be integral to decision making but also to support other young people in making relevant changes. |

Endorsement by Young People

On 28th June I visited the Drama Group (all 3 groups together) to discuss the initial report. Copies were also sent to members of the Disability Forum and Shadow Committee, some of whom I’ve spoken to since. A few changes were made to the report based on the discussions and the young people then endorsed it. Finally, I again summarised what IiC Membership is about and asked the young people whether SPS should get this award. I was overwhelmed by the positive responses of such a large group to the extent I could only note on my writing pad ‘YES!’

Based on what the 25 young people have told me and their endorsement of the report I am happy to recommend that Stockton Parent Support becomes an Investing in Children member.

However, in pursuit of continuous improvement I have recommendations which SPS might like to pursue for next time around.

Recommendations

To discuss with young people issues they raised with me:

- Some of the young people found the rules boring so they may want to look at how that can be improved.
- A further recommendation is to work with the young people to examine the make up of the Disability Forum. The young people said they would like more people on the group and in particular more girls.

In the re-evaluation I would expect Stockton Parents Support to keep up the excellent work of ongoing dialogue with the young people and continue to make changes based on what young people want. Well done!

Angela Stobbart
Investing in Children
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