



Evaluation for Investing in Children membership

Merseyside Access to Play (MAP)

This report will highlight and identify opportunities that exist for children and young people to engage in dialogue within Merseyside Access to Play (Map), in order to make changes to the service.

MAP is a voluntary organisation and aims to work in supported partnership with local communities to develop inclusion for disabled children and young people. MAP offers a range of services, delivering training to groups and individuals who wish to support disabled children and young people who wish to access play, youth and out of school provision. To achieve this MAP places outreach workers in various venues across the city.

MAP's outreach team liaise with families to ensure individual support is available for children and young people who may need assistance to attend the provision of their choice.

Evidence of Dialogue and Change is taken from discussions I had at MAP's new building with Sam, Gerard, Gary, Jake, Jenny, Amanda, Kyle, Craig, Jess and Mark.

Youth Theatre

The youth theatre was set up in partnership with the North West Disability Arts Forum (NWDAF) for 14 – 19 year olds; the group meets on a regular basis and is supported by two theatre directors.

Gary enthusiastically told me about his experiences of the youth theatre. **'We told the MAP workers that we would like to have a drama club. It is really fun and I enjoy meeting new friends. I really enjoy it and it lets me be me. I choose what I want to do and what I don't want to do.'** I asked Gary if he has been involved in changing anything within the youth theatre. **'We have told the workers that we don't like the name of the drama club 'Inclusive youth theatre' we are thinking of different names to call it. We have come up with some suggestions and we are going to vote on them.'**

Staff Interviews

Craig informed me that he took part in the interviewing process for the apprenticeship posts. Craig was involved with short listing, interviewing and selecting which member of staff he wanted in the posts. **'We asked to be involved in interviewing people, it should happen. It's good to have a young person on the committee especially with a disability. At the end of the day unless you have a disability you'll never know what its like'**. As a result of this process children and young people are now involved in all interview procedures that take place within MAP.

Training Programmes

Mark was keen to discuss the training programme that he had recently completed. Mark was having problems attending the training programme due to other commitments. **"We could not make a training programme because the times didn't fit in with school, so we asked them to change the timetable so we could keep on the programme. The staff listened to us and changed the times to fit around what we want to do"**.

The group also informed me that MAP includes children and young people in the design and delivery of training programmes. **“It is important that we say what we think adults should be learning during training. By us been involved in planning and running the training we get to tell adults what they should be doing and saying to us when they are helping us.”**

Music Project

It is evident from meeting with the children and young people that MAP provides space and time for children and young people to develop the service to meet their needs. Jess informed me: **“We get the option to do what we want to do, if there is anything out there that I really want I suggest to other young people and we take it to the workers and decide if it is possible or not.”**

One idea that Jess took to the outreach worker was to extend the work undertaken by the music project and work with other children and young people in schools. As a result of this dialogue MAP now help other children and young people with disabilities to get involved in music and run the sessions in schools and in partnership with the music project Cool Bananas during school holidays.

Individual Support

MAP encourages children and young people to take part in the organisation and interact with other children and young people. However, they are conscious that some children and young people appreciate the change to be supported on an individual basis. Jenny informed me that when she first came into contact with MAP she appreciated the opportunity to have time with her support worker and after a few months she started to interact with other groups. **I like being part of MAP. It gives me the confidence to believe in what I want to say, I feel comfortable with the workers so I practice my opinion on them then give it to people outside of MAP. I have a right to be involved in things and treated the same as other people.’**

Another aspect of the support that MAP provides children and young people is supporting them to have access to any service that they wish and encourage the children and young people to challenge injustice. **“When I went to my youth project they would not let me into the club as my support worker was not there. I went to MAP and told them how angry this made me. They helped me talk to that club and they allowed me in without my support worker. It really changed my life; it made me feel normal like other kids. Now I suggest ways that MAP can help other children and young people access their clubs.”** (Kyle)

Conclusion

MAP supports children and young people who wish to access services of their choice but come across barriers which do not allow this to occur. Kyle informed me that before he attended MAP he would just accept that he could not go into places. **“I just got frustrated; I could not do what I wanted to do, because other people did not understand my disability or places had bad access. MAP helped me realise that it was not me with the problem but other people and places”.**

The children and young people I met with felt that MAP helped to **“stop us from being different, it makes everyone the same, you’re a young person not a young person with or without a disability I feel valued by MAP workers, they listen to my opinion and actually do something about it”.**

The children and young people who I spoke to were happy with the service that MAP provides; however, they would like to work on a few changes which they recommend they work on with project staff.

“Set up a group because we don’t always get the chance to be together.”

“We should make a suggestion box that we can keep in the new building so new young people can have a say when they come in and out of the office.”

MAP provides a safe environment for children and young people from a wide range of backgrounds to come together in a friendly relaxed atmosphere. It is clear that they have ownership over MAP and are keen to be part of the decision making process. I am sure that the project staff will work alongside the children and young people on the above recommendations for the future.

MAP has excellent dialogue with the children and young people that use their service. The children and young people involved in this report have agreed the content and recommendations. It is with great pleasure that on behalf of the children and young people I recommend Merseyside Access to Play for Investing in Children Membership

I would like to finish this report with a quote from Kyle. **“Ask us - we know what we want to make our lives better.”**

Well done and keep up the hard work!

Kim Kyle
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Investing in Children
January 2008