



Evaluation for Investing in Children membership

Choices Project (Merseyside Youth Association)

The Choices Project was established in 1996 to provide children and young people with disabilities aged 7 to 19 the opportunity to have fun and try new things in a safe, stimulating and protective environment.

They offer short residential breaks for young people to give them the opportunity to get involved in new activities or simply relax with some friends. These residential breaks take place across the north in areas such as the Lake District, Wales and Yorkshire.

On my recent visit to the Choices Project I met with Lou. She explained the project tries to promote the development of disabled children and young people and their inclusion in mainstream services. Also their work aims to enable children and young people to meet friends, try new things, develop skills, have a taste of independence, get a break from home and most importantly, get out, play and have fun. I also had the pleasure of meeting with Lucas, Katherine and Cally.

Evidence of Dialogue and Change

Activities

Lucas told me, **“I have been coming here since I was eleven. It’s really good to get out, it gets you out of the house.”** Cally added, **“And in the half term you get to go places.”** Lucas said, **“We all go to school together and so we can do things after school. We do things like dance workshops and we use to do Tai Chi. But ever since I started, they ask questions. We all talk about where we want to go and the kids say what activities they want to do.”** Cally agreed, **“We work and feel like part of a team. Before we do activities we get into a group and discuss what we want to do.”** Lucas added, **“Everyone gets listened to, just like an adult. We talk about things the same way as adults.”** Katherine was very much in agreement.

Residential Breaks

Cally told me, **“I was asked if I wanted to go. Everyone gets the chance to go on one. We all say yeah cos we want to go away with our friends. Then we all talk about what we want to do.”** Cally explained further, **“When you go first time, they come to your house and talk to you.”** Lucas continued, **“They say this is what we do, and then they ask what you want to do cos it’s your holiday. And then you tell them. So then they plan it with you, but not until you all discuss what you want to do.”** Lucas said, **“We do have standard options of places to go and things to do. Like there’s archery and orienteering cos we all know what we like to do. But most of the time everyone can add on things that they want to do. And things do get changed around.”**

Katherine told me the last break was a weekend away to Crosby Hall and that the group decided that they would like to do a bit of pampering and de stressing while they are away. Katherine said, **“I wanted my nails done and my hair blow dried.”** Lucas added, **“If someone asks to do something that’s impossible, then the adults will try to explain why we can’t do it. So we think of something else.”** Lucas proudly told me

about a recent trip which was totally planned by the young people. **“After school we all met with Dan and he supported us but we planned the trip.”**

Evaluations

After a break away, the young people complete an evaluation form so that everyone's views are taken into account. Lucas said, **“We put what activities we would like to do more of. Swimming is always really popular.”** The group told me that in one of the Centres they use for breaks, the life guards are only there at certain times. Lucas added that this limited the time the young people could go swimming. He said, **“We all wanted to swim more. We were asking why our staff couldn't just do it, watch us swim.”** In response to this request, the staff at Choices successfully completed their Royal Life Saving Society Certificate.

Lucas also told me about another time the staff responded to what the young people were asking for. **“When we wanted to do walks, we needed a qualified leader. So the Choices Workers got their BELA”** (British Expedition Leaders Award) **So now we can go for walks, that's when I'm not getting stuck in the mud.”**

Big Brother Diary Room

Some of the young people don't enjoy filling in the evaluation forms. Cally said, **“So we decided it would be better to have a Big Brother Diary Room. Not everyone likes writing. It was all our idea”** Lucas added, **“Some of the kids were asking to do it, cos they really like the show.”** Cally explained how it works. **“It's like where people just go in and someone asks what you have liked. Then you say what you have liked.”** Katherine said, **“We can still fill in the forms but I prefer the Diary Room.”** Lucas finished by telling me, **“We have post-it notes that people can write on, and different forms they can fill in. But the younger ones will come and just talk to us. But we are always talking.”** (See attached)

Undoubtedly the Choices Project is built on the principle that young people have the right to be heard, listened to and their views bring about meaningful change. The young people I met with were adamant that at Choices they are involved in all decisions affecting them. The young people agreed with this report and agreed unanimously that Choices Project should receive Investing In Children membership. Well Done.

**Glenys Newby
Investing in Children
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