



Re-evaluation for Investing in Children membership

Blackhall Youth Club

Blackhall Youth Club has been awarded Investing in Children status since April 2004. Alex is the Senior Youth Worker and is assisted by Senior Workers Margaret and Mick. At various times this core group is supported by Paula, Lynn, John and Neil. The committed work of volunteers is crucial to maintaining the youth club. It was recently part of the JAR (Joint Area Review) inspection and Alex is hoping that the commitment and passion of workers and volunteers is recognised.

Blackhall Youth Club works with all young people regardless of age, race, ability or financial situation. However, there is increasing pressure from government to work more closely with the 13 -19 age group to show learning outcomes which are accredited. This sometimes conflicts with the youth club's ethos of being a place that young people can just come along to and chill.

I had a lively conversation with the following young people:

- Dafydd
- Steven
- Becky
- Fiona
- Ashleigh
- Anna
- Rebecca
- Sam

Evidence of Dialogue and Change

Programme

The programme at the youth club includes 2 days (Monday and Thursday) where young people work on accredited learning and recording their evidence of achievement. The other days the young people can do less formal activities or just sit and relax. Although workers are under pressure to achieve targets for accredited learning, if young people choose not to do the learning activities they have the choice not to do them. The youth club has already achieved its targets for this year and many of the young people I spoke to do enjoy the learning based activities.

- Dafydd – “I have no problem doing the achievements.”
- Ashleigh – “It goes towards college work.”
- Steven – “I want to use (my) Duke of Edinburgh Award to help me join the army.”
- Fiona – “I like doing work for awards.”

Awards

As part of the learning based activities the youth club currently offers 3 award programmes:

- Youth Achievement Awards
- Duke of Edinburgh Awards
- Access Awards (which help young people get on to the Duke of Edinburgh)

The awards can be achieved in a number of ways using a variety of activities and challenges. The young people decide which activities and challenges they want to do.

- Dafydd – “We choose which things we want to do”.
- Steven – They ask us where we want to go for expeditions.”
- Dafydd and Steven have both done Duke of Edinburgh Bronze and want to do Silver level.
- Dafydd – “Not many people want to (do Silver award) we like it you stay out longer. You do camping out, walking and hiking.”
- Steven – “Asked what you want and we have done a list on the wall.”
- Fiona – “We have our own files of what we do. We have asked for better files to keep work in but we don’t get them.”

Prime Time Meeting

This quarterly meeting is a chance for young people to discuss and influence the youth club programmes. This was also set up as the young people had requested that ‘they would like to make more decisions in meetings ... as it would give them more responsibility to improve the youth club’. (see notes from Prime Time meeting 29th March 2007). This all helps to generate the 6 weekly programme of activities. It is not yet chaired by a young person but the workers have expressed an interest in moving towards this way of working. It tends to be more girls than boys who attend these meetings.

- Becky – “Girls do planning.”
- Dafydd – “Primetime is for girls! We can go if we want to but don’t want to.”
- Anon. – “Margaret chairs meetings and its like its working towards inspections all the time!.”
- Becky – “It would be good if we could chair meeting or have our own meeting. We could decide better if we met (without workers).”
- Ashleigh – “Had a choice of trips.”
- Becky – “We decided about theatre. We pick where we go and what we do.”

External Funding

At the Prime Time meeting funding bids are also discussed and completed involving young people. So far this financial year the youth club has successfully raised £16,750:

- £250 from Blackhall, Hesledon and Castle Eden Health Forum – Equipment for Disabled Group.
- £4,000 from Youth Opportunity Fund – Performing Art Project for theatre visits and residential in London.
- £5,500 from Youth Capital Fund – Refurbishment Grant to be spent on new doors and furniture.
- £7,000 from Local Network Fund for Children and Young People. Increase disabled access and continue Duke of Edinburgh, Youth Achievement and Access Awards.

The young people said that they would like to have their own funding and they could decide what to spend it on, for example arts activities and events. They were aware of the problems of current funding in that it has to be spent on certain things out of everyone’s control. But they did express a strong interest in organising fund raising events including sponsored walks / coffee mornings etc., which would give them some freedom to budget for a few of their own activities.

- Fiona – “I’d like to do more fund raising events.”

They also expressed a strong desire to try and get funding for a new/er mini bus, which they felt was becoming shabby. Again the young people realised this was a big undertaking and wouldn’t happen easily.

What’s good

I asked the young people what they liked about coming to the youth centre apart from what they had already mentioned:

- Ashleigh - “Margaret is canny crack.”
- Ashleigh/ Becky and Fiona – “We do lots of our own posters and we put our name on so that the adults know who has made them.”
- Fiona – “Like theatre visits.”
- Ashleigh – “Like doing work for the awards.”
- Becky – “It’s warm.”
- Fiona/ Ashleigh – “Keeps us off the streets and out of trouble.”
- Steven – “Playstations.”
- Dafydd – “Its canny good – staff are ok!”
- Rebecca – “Sports and going places.”
- Anna – “Going on trips.”
- Fiona – “A variety of stuff to do.”
- Dafydd – “Went to Weardale.”
- “We play music and relax.”

What’s wrong and what to change

I asked the young people what they didn’t like about the youth club apart from what had already been said and what they would change:

- Steven – “We couldn’t go to Wet n Wild but they explained it was because there wasn’t enough people wanted to go!”
- “We have paperwork to do every Thursday.”
- Sam – “To be treated more grown up.”
- “Could do with newer / better babies (The Ready or Not Tots).”
- Sam – “Would like a quad bike.”
- Ashleigh – “Should have own funding to spend.”
- Fiona – “Don’t let you go in yard. We should be able to talk about the issues like safety.”
- “We are worried about the asbestos in the building.”
- ”Lads don’t come on the theatre trips.”
- Becky / Fiona and Ashleigh – “We can’t write on flip charts. We don’t do discos. We don’t have a whiteboard. We’d like decks.”
- “Don’t always trust us and we sometimes get blame for what the little ‘uns do.”
- Ashleigh – “We’d like to do more mixed trips.”

At the end of the meeting we were all told that the whiteboard had been delivered and was going to be installed soon – and that was something that a few young people had mentioned as being a change they wanted to see happen!

Recommendations

There are a few issues raised by the young people that I would like Alex and the other workers to consider over the coming year.

- That the workers open up a dialogue with the young people to see how they want to be involved in decision making. The young people expressed both a desire to chair the Primetime meetings and to hold their own meetings which would be adult free.
- That the workers also talk to the young people about how they can be more involved in allocating the money raised, obviously recognising the limitations that come with external funding.

Conclusion

The young people clearly want to keep coming to the youth club and want to be more heavily involved in decision making from how money is raised, to allocation of budgets for activities and look of the building. At my return visit on 12th November the young people (although some were not present) agreed the report and wanted the youth club to be Investing in Children Membership status. I was told about the extra funding which had been awarded - £40k – and that it has been spent on new computer suite and photocopier. The young people pointed out the whiteboard which has now been installed and will be linked to the computers.

There are lots of examples of dialogue and change highlighted throughout this report. With the endorsement of the young people who go there I recommend that Blackhall Youth Club once again is awarded Investing in Children status.

Angela Stobbart
Investing in Children
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