



Evaluation for Investing in Children membership

Derwentside District Council - Spice Project

This report will highlight and identify opportunities that exist for children and young people to engage in dialogue within Derwentside District Council's Spice Project in order to make changes to the service. I visited Spice on numerous occasions and had the pleasure of meeting with; Luke, Yasmin, Manny, James, Nathan, Shannon, Findlay, Scott, Jordon, Jamie, Jade, Jane, Gemma, Phillip, Karl, Lauren, Tammy, Melissa, Dale, Richard, Nicola and Patrick.

SPICE (The Special Project to Implement Children's Election) is Derwentside District Councils Approach to including children and young people in democracy.

The overall aim of SPICE is to bring children and young people closer to democratic issues, enhance their understanding of local government and its services and most importantly engage them in decision making.

The project has three different areas of work including the Young Peoples Forums Children Choice (8-11 year olds) and the Youth Panel (12-19 year olds) The Ellie Bus and Spicetacular.

Evidence of dialogue and change within the SPICE project is provided by the children and young people I met with on separate occasions during meetings of the Children's Choice group and The Youth Panel.

The youth forums are democratically elected and meet once a month and are together for two years, panel members are elected by other children and young people in schools and represent their individual wards throughout Derwentside.

The forum meetings are open to children and young people who want to ask the group to help them with issues/concerns that they have. **"Some young people came to us with concerns about the condition of the skate park and that it needs to be maintained better than what it is."** The group mentioned this to councillors and the skate parks have now begun to be cleaned up. **"Work still needs to be done, but we have started with that."**

Young People have mentioned to forum members that they need to be more approachable. As a result of this identified need the youth panel have decided that they are **"going to split up into smaller groups and meet other children and young people in our wards and hold events where the children and young people can come and speak to us and tell us what we should be working on."**

Both forums are often approached by different departments of the council and other external organisations, to carry out research on various issues. **"We only take part in pieces of work that are important to us as children; we speak to children and young people about what they would like in their area. A lot of young people told us that they had nowhere to go on a night time and that they were bored."**

The group thought about the best way to solve the problem and came up with the idea of having the 'Ellie Bus'.

“We held meetings with the council to look at how to get the money and what areas the bus should go to. We also looked at what should go in the bus and what it should look like, the bus is now running and we get information about what people think of it”

The bus operates as a Mobile Youth Service four nights a week within targeted wards. The project staff are working alongside children and young people to extend the number of places the bus visits, including an early evening session on a Friday evening.

The areas that the bus visits have limited youth provision and include Blackhill, Consett, Stanley and Burnopfield. The bus provides the opportunity for young people to receive confidential advice on lots of different issues. As well as sessions on health promotion, anti-bullying, diversity and other issues decided by the children and young people. **“I like coming on the bus, its fun, we can do what we want, and we choose all our games, its mint”**

I visited the bus during a Tuesday evening session, the children and young people on the bus showed me around, pointing out the, PS2, laptops with internet access, DJ equipment, games, TV's and Videos and 'magic tricks'.

The Youth Panel are currently looking into leisure facilities in certain areas, to make the service more accessible to older young people. Nicola is meeting with members of the leisure service to discuss the redevelopment of Quebec Park. When I asked why this was important, Nicola informed me that **“the park has been designed more for children rather than young people so the group are looking at what other things we could put into that area”**

The Children's Choice group enthusiastically informed me of the work they have done to combat bullying in schools. The group decided to take on this issue after a lot of children came to them and said that they were unhappy at school. Manny informed me; **“what's the point in just talking about stuff, we make sure that things get done”** I asked the group what they have actually done to stop the bullies in their schools, Jane confidently informed me **“We can't let bullies bully – we encouraged school councils to have 'bully boxes' you can write your problem down and the schools council and teachers would do something about it. It actually works; people in my school think it's a great idea.”**

The children and young people I met with from all the different areas of the Spice are focused upon what they wish to achieve as a group. I asked all the groups if they felt listened to: Nathan responded **“Children have rights and should be listened to rather than adults making decisions. I like giving my ideas and going to the meetings, its fun.”** Nathan I agree with you, it is evident that all members of SPICE are included in dialogue and are actively implementing change throughout Derwentside.

It is evident that SPICE is supporting children and young people become actively involved in real decision making, with a real budget, giving them a true voice in matters that affect their lives. However if I needed anymore information as I was about to leave Phillip informed me that children and young people from the forums were involved on the interview panel for the newly appointed Principal Youth Engagement Officer **“it is important that we get a say in which worker we get, its us who work with them”**.

All the children and young people who I spoke to were happy with the service that SPICE offers; however they would like to work on a few changes which they recommend they work on with the staff team over the next year;

- Make a SPICE Children's Say form that we could leave in all schools and children could write down what they would like us to do, if they don't want to come to our meetings then they don't have to.
- We would like to receive more information about how our issues have been taken on board, it would be good for the councillors to meet and tell us.
- Invite councillors to more of our meetings so they can come and speak to us face to face more often.

All the young people I met with were very positive about SPICE. They feel that they have the opportunity to participate in the direction of not just the project but also the Council as a whole.

The young people involved in this report agree with the content and recommendations made. Therefore it is on their behalf that I have no hesitation in recommending that Derwentside District Council – SPICE project becomes an Investing in Children member.

Kim Kyle
Investing in Children
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