



## Evaluation for Investing in Children membership

### Integrating Children

Integrating Children is a registered charity providing support for children and young people with a disability to access mainstream activities after school, at weekends and during school breaks. The aim is to provide a unique resource for children and young people with a disability, and their parents and carers in the Durham and Chester-Le-Street areas to promote and enhance self confidence, self esteem and social inclusion. This is accomplished by providing practical and personal support to enable the child or young person to overcome a range of physical, personal and attitudinal barriers. Integrating Children state:

- We provide support to help develop confidence in children/young people and their families to identify and experience a range of options with support as necessary, through Person Centred Planning
- We provide Life Skills training to help reach their own personal potential
- We aim to provide parents/carers with respite
- We expect to increase awareness and to establish partnerships with providers of services e.g. leisure centres, bowling alleys, Guides etc. for the promotion of inclusive activities

Integrating Children's Values of Inclusion are:

- All people have gifts and capabilities
- All people have dreams and aspirations
- All people need friendships and relationships
- All people have a right to live in and be part of the community, to have a sense of belonging to the community
- People should have power and control over their own lives
- Every person has a voice and the right to be heard
- Community can benefit from embracing diversity
- All means ALL!

For this evaluation I had the pleasure of meeting with Janet, the co-ordinator of Integrating Children, a number of children and young people who come to Integrating Children, their parents and some of the volunteers and support workers.

### **Evidence of Dialogue and Change**

It is clear from the aims and values of Integrating Children listed above that their entire practice is based on working with each child as an individual who takes charge of their choices and activities.

When a child or young person first experiences Integrating Children the initial meeting is about them, for them and absolutely including them. It begins with Janet finding out what they are interested in, what they enjoy doing, or what they might like to try. If a child or young person identifies something they'd like to do then Janet organises a key worker

for the young person and they begin the activity together. Sometimes the children and young people aren't sure what they'd like to do Janet tells them about the activities that run for other young people so that they might get some ideas. The kind of activities that happen are bowling, swimming, trips to the cinema, an I.T. club, trips to Diggerland, Metroland, going out for meals, going shopping, karate, going to the Girl Guides, and the list can continue to grow as young people have different ideas. Each child or young person is allocated two hours per week to do their activity of their choice, and two days per week during school holidays.

Initially support is one-to-one, sometimes two-to-one for swimming if necessary, and the support is tailor-made for each individual young person, and after a key worker is allocated the child or young person is able to change if they feel they get on with someone else and would rather have another volunteer as their key worker. It is very flexible and often young people get to spend time with different volunteers if there is a group activity.

Group activities are kept on a small scale, to look and feel more natural. When I visited a group at the bowling alley in Durham that was how it appeared. Volunteers and support workers are young people themselves and the group had two lanes booked, and some were taking part in bowling while others played pool nearby. The children and young people take their own money and buy drinks and sweets as and when they want during the time they are there.

Parents provide transport, and I spoke to two mums who were waiting to pick up their children. Callum's mum told me he hadn't been taking part in Integrating Children activities for very long. She told me that when Janet first visited him he couldn't think of an activity he would like to try. Eventually he decided to test out the bowling, and now he thoroughly enjoys it. Watching him taking part it was clear to see he had developed a friendship with another young person, they were cheering each other on and enjoying the music that was playing, singing along and playing air guitar together!

At the I.T. club based at the volunteer centre in Chester-Le-Street, where the Integrating Children office is, a number of young people come along to use the computers and to play games on the Play Station or X Box. At the I.T. club I met Ryan. He told me, **"I told Janet this is what I enjoy doing, it was set up for me. The Play Station is here, I bring the games, like Battle Front and Star Wars. I like going on the computer, I like the Play Station best."**

Whilst at the club I asked Ryan if he took part in any other activities with Integrating Children, his reply was **"it would be okay to do other things as well."** At this point Janet asked what else would he like to do, and Ryan said he'd like to try swimming. David, his key worker was there and they talked about him coming to swimming that Saturday to try it out. Ryan said he often had other things going on at the weekends but he was reassured that he could just go along when he felt like it. When his dad came to pick him up later he got the details and Ryan was going to be going swimming – it was that easy.

Ryan has also gone shopping, he went with Janet to Argos to buy a new controller for the Play Station, **"I knew what we needed and where to go,"** he told me.

I also met Edward at the I.T. club, he and his mum have been coming along and using the computers in the office to build up their I.T. skills as they don't have access to a computer at home. Edward told me, **"The good thing about here is you don't get told**

**what to do, you can do what you want, there's an X Box and a Play Station. I practise on the computer."**

Edward also goes swimming on a Saturday which he enjoys, **"They have support workers there as well and you get to do what you like."**

Edward's mum said that Tom, a support worker had accompanied Edward to an event at the Hermitage school, learning how to play in an orchestra. Edward's school couldn't provide support for him so Integrating Children stepped in for this one-off event.

Edward said that he enjoyed being part of Integrating Children, **"it is very fun."** He has written a piece for their newsletter telling people about the great clubs and activities (see attached).

Children and young people are at the very heart of Integrating Children, all of the plans are built around them and if they have ideas or suggestions they are taken on board and implemented I have no hesitation in recommending that Integrating Children receive Investing in Children membership.

**Lisa Lines**  
**Investing in Children Project Worker**  
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