



Evaluation for Investing in Children membership

PLAY – Progressive Learning Activities for Youngsters

The PLAY project is funded through Stockton's Children's Fund and managed by St John's Community Partnership. PLAY works across Ragworth, Newtown, Primrose Hill, Roseworth, Victoria, Hardwick and Portrack and Tilery.

The project was started in 2002 by Dawn Campbell of St John's Community Partnership, who felt there was a lack of opportunities for children and young people in these areas of Stockton.

Currently there are over 2000 children and young people registered with the scheme, and around 300 children attend sessions per quarter, although these figures can fluctuate.

For this evaluation I spoke with Julie and I went along to meet some of the children during the summer holiday sessions, I had the pleasure of talking to Patsy, Lisa, Macaulay, Amy, Colin, Lewis, Charlie, Jack and Callum.

Evidence of Dialogue & Change

From the project's inception children and young people were at the heart of the planning and development and this ethos has grown and evolved.

During the initial period Julie conducted questionnaires in the areas, speaking to children and young people and their parents. She asked about the best times for activities and asked what the children and young people would like to do.

Groups started based on the findings of the questionnaires, and the sessions included circle time and team games which the children has asked for, and often the children ran the sessions themselves. At the end of the sessions they were asked what they had enjoyed and also what could be improved.

Julie attended a participation forum and met with Michele Deans from the Voices project. In meeting with her she discovered that she and her team could continue to involve children and young people in their groups in a meaningful way, by being less prescriptive and allowing the children and young people to take control of their groups. From this point on Julie has encouraged her team to work in this way and they have found it to be a better way of engaging with children and young people.

Attendance Box

Each area works differently and has its own needs. They have governed themselves and each group has their own set of rules which they keep in their attendance boxes. The children have stamps for good behaviour as they felt that it was important to be recognised for doing well, and each group has different expectations, and different reasons for receiving stamps. There are rewards for achieving stamps which have been decided by the children.

Amy told me about her group, **"We have stamps on cards for being good and for coming, that's our rule, it's a good rule."**

Planning Sessions

The sessions run after school for the younger age groups and later for older groups. There are regular sessions during the school holidays as well. The content of the sessions varies depending on what the children and young people ask for. The session I attended was held in the hall of a community centre. The two staff from PLAY arrived with a boot full of games and activities. The children arrived and laid them out where they wanted them in the hall and lots of things were going. There was a game of football with a sponge ball in one end of the hall, a table with colouring sheets and pens, a large collage being created in the floor, skipping, Lego, train tracks, cars, puzzles and games. In the hall there was also a table-tennis table that could be used if the children wanted it.

Often the sessions are almost entirely run by the children, they plan ahead for the next session, and can request different equipment and toys to be brought along, Amy told me, **“We put our hand up and say what we want next week.”** This is recorded on a sheet, either by one of the children or by a worker (see attached), then the staff record the actual items requested by the children on a Children’s Request Form (see attached).

Charlie told me, **“I like playing with the Lego, they bring it all the time, they know I like it.”** Charlie went on, **“I like the football it’s always on, and I ask for jigsaws and they bring what I ask for.”**

Lewis said, **“I like football, and I like playing with the dinosaurs, sometimes they bring them with them, sometimes they don’t, I can ask for them.”**

Jack told me, **“There’s football, it’s always on, everyone likes it. I like the Play Station, and I like colouring in Spongebob pictures.”**

Callum talked to me about enjoying the sessions, **“I like playing football, all the boys do, and I like playing table tennis, if I want it I just ask and I get to play with it. I like skipping and playing with the toys.”**

School Holidays

During the school holidays the children are asked what they would like to do. Some trips are organised while other sessions are held in the centres, the trips are based on the suggestions from the children. Amy told me, **“Sometimes we go on trips, they post a sheet to our house and we get to choose where we want to go.”**

She went on to tell me about the trip they had earlier in the week, **“It was fun going round the museum, but we didn’t get to go to the park or for a picnic because it was raining.”**

Lisa also told me about the trip, **“We went in the museum, you got to dress up, and it was good.”**

Other trips that have been planned previously have been to Lightwater Valley, which Amy told me she had really enjoyed.

Interviewing New Staff

Children and young people have been involved in the appointment of new staff for the project. All candidates are asked to take a session with a group of children as part of their interview process. Following this the children are asked for feedback about each candidate and the views and opinions of the children are a valuable indicator in appointing staff.

Under Spend

At the end of the last financial year the PLAY project had a small under spend which Julie divided equally between all of the groups which equated to each group having around £100 to spend. Each group discussed how they would like to spend the money and worked together democratically to find something that everyone could enjoy. They showed numerous ways of working out how to spend the money and had processes of narrowing down the choices by voting so that all of the group were involved (see sheets attached).

It is clear from visiting the project, both in the office and at groups; that children and young people are at the centre of all of the planning and decisions, and that is due to the commitment of the staff team to work in this way. The children I met with were very happy with the project and clearly enjoyed being part of it. When I asked if they felt that they had a say in the project all of the children agreed that they did. Amy said, **“We get to say what we want and choose.”** Callum added, **“If you want it you just ask for it.”**

Patsy, Lisa, Macaulay, Amy, Colin, Lewis, Charlie, Jack and Callum all agreed that the PLAY project should receive Investing in Children membership and I wholeheartedly agree with them.

Lisa Lines
Investing in Children
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