



investing in children

Evaluation for Investing in Children membership:

Young Carers Eastern Ravens Trust

Eastern Ravens Trust is a registered charity which provides activities to young people in Stockton Borough. One specific project is the Young Carers Project. This project is open to any young person aged 8 to 17 who is a carer to another family member. These young people may be providing care and support to people with mental health issues, physical disability, illness, sensory loss, drug and alcohol addiction.

Young people can join the Young Carers project by self referring or being referred by parents, teachers, social workers or health visitors. The Young Carers sessions run on a Tuesday night for 8 to 13 year olds and on a Thursday night for 14 to 17 year olds. Transport is provided to those that need it.

Young carers is an approachable service where young people can meet and socialise on a regular basis. It allows young people with caring responsibilities within the home, the chance to let off steam. The young people I spoke to value the service. They said, **“The best thing about coming here is all of the friends”** and **“Everyone always listens to you and you make new friends.”**

For the purpose of this evaluation I met and talked to both groups. During my visits to the Tuesday group I had the pleasure of meeting with Laura, Georgia, JoJo, Kelly, Dylan, Jordan, Brad, Ryan, Sonny, Jack, Sam, Scott and David. During my visit to the Thursday group I spoke with Joe, John, Chantelle, Jenny, Natalie and Leanne.

Evidence of Dialogue and Change

Tuesday Session (8 to 13 year olds)

I was invited to attend a very lively planning group meeting. Everyone was involved in planning future sessions and everyone was encouraged to put forward their thoughts and ideas. This was done very informally and everybody’s suggestions were written onto a flip chart. The young people were aware of budget constraints and they also talked about health and safety considerations.

The young people agreed the first session should be an indoor session. Kelly came up with the idea of playing board games; Scott wanted to make smoothies; while JoJo wanted to watch a film. Laura said she would like a disco. Kelly then suggested, **“Everyone should try lots of different foods from different countries.”** Ryan then suggested that there should be, **“pillow fights”** and lots of the boys enthusiastically agreed. However, after the group talked about the problems that might arise, they decided to abandon the idea. There was a unanimous **“YES”** to Georgia’s idea of having a **“separate boys and girls night.”**

To the credit of the young people and to the way the group has been set up, everyone felt happy to express their views and share their ideas.

The group then moved on to talk about planning the outdoor sessions. There was a little bit of confusion as to whether this meant **“outdoors at the centre or in the outside world.”** Once this was cleared up, the ideas and opinions came thick and fast.

Kelly asked if everyone would like to go swimming, while Jack suggested going to the Laser Quest. Sam wanted to go snowboarding and JoJo thought going to visit different Museums would be interesting. Ryan suggested playing basketball while Georgia suggested going out for a meal

After all the discussions finished and all the ideas were written up, the group democratically decided which activities they would like to do. They voted by a show of hands and went with the majority decision. The group decided that one week they would play games and the second week they would watch a DVD. (The girls couldn't persuade the boys to have a disco.) For the outdoor session the group decided to go snowboarding. Laura told me, **“People always listen to us; it's good that we get to choose the things we want to do.”**

Thursday Session (14 to 17 year old)

Natalie, Leanne and John left me in no doubt as to why they like going to Young Carers. Leanne said, **“It's good to come and meet people”** and Natalie added, **“You get to socialise with people”**. John told me, **“It gives you a break from what happens at home.”**

Activities

Natalie said, **“We have planning meetings where we put our ideas down.”** Leanne explained, **“We put loads of ideas onto paper and then we have a vote.”** Chantelle told me about a recent pyjama party the girls had. She said, **“We did food and had a party.”** Joe added, **“We went bowling and snow boarding. We go for meals out and stuff like that.”** John continued, **“The things we do here are really good cos it's what the kids decide. It's all our ideas.”**

Young Carers Festival

John told me, **“We went to Southampton. Leanne and Chantelle went too. It was through this. If we didn't come here we wouldn't have had the chance to go.”** Joe added, **“We got invited through this. We watched a DVD about last year's festival. There was live music and that. If you didn't want to do one thing there were plenty of other things to do.”** He explained further, **“We talked about why there's not enough places to hang out and why adults think they know best and never listen.”** Chantelle enthusiastically continued, **“We talked to a MP and put our views about what it's like to be a carer and about our education. Do we feel our views are being heard in school?”** Leanne said **“It helped us meet other carers.”** Chantelle said, **“From the festival we went to the Youth Assembly and put our views across. Everyone here helped us. Vicky who comes here is the chair of the Youth Assembly so she can put our views forward as well.”**

CHICKS

The group explained all about Country Holidays for Inner City Kids. Leanne said, **“We went to Cornwall. When we were there we went swimming, horse riding and we went to an adventure park. And we went shopping.”** Joe told me, **“It was basically a rest from what you usually do for your parents and that.”**

John said, **“After our trips we give Tracey feedback, about what we thought. We either say personally or we talk about it in the group. But it's not loads of forms to fill in.”** Chantelle continued, **“If we think anything is bad then they change things.”**

When we went to Southampton the coach was really hot and we had nothing to do. So we told Tracey and Brian, so on the way back they made sure we stopped more often and they got loads of DVD's for us to watch. And they made sure we had lots to drink."

Future Developments

On all my visits it was very evident that Young Carers is built on mutual respect. Undoubtedly the service is built on the principle that young carers have the right to be heard and listened to and that they have a right to information and advice on issues concerning them. I have no doubt that the young people are consulted and involved in all decisions affecting them.

At present the Annual General Meeting is used as a celebration evening where the Board of Directors meet with the young carers. However, over the coming year, there are plans to develop a Young Carer's Users group with the view to the young people taking on more of a "committee role." It is hoped that this will feed into the Management Board and also represent Young Carers at the Youth Assembly. It will be interesting to see how this develops and I look forward to hearing all about it next year.

I would like to thank everyone who helped me to write this evaluation. When I asked the young people if they agreed if that Young Carers should get Investing in Children membership there was an unanimous YES! Therefore I have no hesitation in recommending that Young Carers Eastern Raven Trust receives Investing in Children membership. Well Done.

Glenys Newby

Project Worker, Investing in Children

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