



## Evaluation for Investing in Children Membership Grangefield Youth & Community Centre

Grangefield Youth & Community Centre opened in 1973 in a building formerly used as Ashmores Sports & Social Club. It is situated on the outskirts of Stockton and draws in young people from as far away as Norton. I visited the club in February 2007 and met with the senior youth worker Mike King, members of his youth work team and young people.

Mike explained to me what Grangefield provides. The club opens five nights a week and provides an impressive range of activities and opportunities for young people. Attendance is particularly high and a typical youth club session can cater for around 80 young people. As well as youth work sessions, Grangefield provides a number of specialist clubs which include gymnastics, basketball, volleyball, music and graffiti art. There is also a club for children and young people with learning difficulties. At my first visit there were five workers managing a huge two story building containing several rooms catering for 60+ young people. Later that evening there were several other clubs about to start.

One of these clubs caters for children and young people from families seeking asylum in the Cleveland area both in terms of activities and family support. There are a number of ethnic minority groups that have their own clubs such as the Asian Volleyball Team but in the main children from minority groups are encouraged to join the regular youth club sessions which they do in large numbers. Grangefield is involved in a number of inter-agency projects such as Health and Sports days to which organisations like Eastern Ravens Young Carers Project, The Asylum Support Project, Stockton International Family Centre and Stockton Family Support Team (Learning Difficulties) are invited. Staff members also attend other youth centres to offer voluntarily support.

Youth work at Grangefield comes under the umbrella of the Stockton Borough Council Education in the Community department and has to meet the requirements of the service by providing curriculum based education programs for young people. These include sessions which cover health, relationships issues, safe sex, drug & alcohol misuse as well as programs to promote achievement through Duke of Edinburgh Award and other accreditation schemes. Mike explained that while he likes to encourage young people to take part in education programs he sees Grangefield as a place where young people can feel relaxed and under no pressure from him or his staff team. *"If young people want to come in just to play pool or meet with their friends then we fully respect their wishes, it is their right to choose"* He added *"we can still meet the needs of the curriculum by allowing young people to choose and design their own education programs if they want to"*

During our discussions Mike provided me with extensive record of activities, projects and young people's involvement over the past few years. This is a hugely successful youth project and the number of young people who have been involved with Grangefield in the

past few years runs into thousands. Mike puts this success down to the respect he and his workers have for young people which is reciprocated, *"unless we can demonstrate that we respect young people and value their opinions then there is little hope of them showing respect to us or achieving anything"*.

The centre has its own slogan *'give a little, take a little, share a little'*

### Dialogue with young people

Dialogue with young people is mostly informal and takes place during youth club sessions with different groups and ages of young people. Mike has eschewed the more formal youth council or forum in favour of less structured chats and meetings with young people which he says young people prefer. This was borne out in my discussions with Rebecca and Amy who are both aged 14. Rebecca told me the youth workers are very approachable.

*"If we have an idea or want to raise a question we just go to one of the workers, we get everything we want really"*

*"Most of the things we decide are ideas about trips away to places like Flamingo Land"*

Another youth club member, Ben, who is 16 also contributes to discussions about the activity program but also explained how young people can raise issues or concerns very easily with staff.

*"The workers are approachable and we are encouraged to get involved about the way the centre is run. They are always coming to us to check things out"*

Ben is one of a number of older youth club members who get involved in helping out and contributing to the work of the centre, he told me he might become a youth worker one day.

### Change

Mike has seen many changes to Grangefield over recent years. Not least in the way it has adapted to the changes in the local community and an increase in the number of children and young people from ethnic minorities. Everyone at Grangefield is extremely proud of the how inclusive the service has become.

The Centre has grown into something that the whole community are encouraged to use and contribute to. Young people are seen as users of the facilities and also important decision makers who have helped the service develop. One of the areas where young people have played a crucial role is in fund raising for the centre which has helped extend the range of opportunities. This was a point made by the youth club members I spoke to who told me they get more enjoyment and satisfaction from trip away or for new sports equipment when they have raised the money themselves. All of the young people I spoke to had a good idea of how the club is managed and financed.

## Conclusion

Grangefield Youth & Community Centre is an extremely busy place with a huge range of activities and opportunities for young people. The people who work at the centre have created an inclusive and open service in which diversity is strongly promoted. Mike King has described to me a service that has adapted to changes in the local community and the higher demands placed on it by young people, not just from the high numbers who attend, but also from their expectation of a good quality youth service. During my visits I had the opportunity to talk to young people and observe some of the many projects they are involved in, in all of my discussions I was left with the impression that they enjoy coming to the centre and that their views are valued and respected. Because much of the dialogue with young people is informal and not always recorded it is probably more difficult to point to particular examples of where young people have had a direct influence on the service, on the other hand it is the informality and relaxed approach that the young people I spoke to value so much. There are no strict rules at Grangefield just expectations that staff and young people respect each other and work together and it is clear to any visitor that this is exactly what happens.

I was a pleasure to meet with staff and young people at Grangefield and experience the work going on there. I have no hesitation in recommending that Grangefield Youth & Community Centre becomes an Investing in Children Service.

**B.Stock**

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