

# national transition support team

working together to improve transition  
for disabled young people

## Case Study: Richmond upon Thames (participation)

### Introduction

This case study describes how a voluntary organisation in Richmond upon Thames is helping young disabled people develop training on disability awareness for a range of organisations in the borough.

### Overview

A voluntary organisation in Richmond upon Thames is helping young disabled people develop training on disability awareness for a range of organisations in the borough. The aim is to establish long term relationships with local organisations and consequently improve the way they provide services for disabled people.

Three Wings Trust works with a group of 16 young people with learning difficulties aged between 12 to 21 who are producing a DVD, postcards and a poster to explain to an outside audience the difficulties they experience when using local mainstream services. The group hopes to expand to involve young people with a wider range of disabilities so that the training can provide local businesses with a full picture of the changes they might make.

### Main transferable learning points

- Disabled young people can act as mentors to businesses by showing them the difficulties they experience accessing mainstream services.
- Friendly organisations and familiar venues to help the young people build up their confidence.
- By influencing organisations to make sometimes very small changes, this can make a big difference in the way disabled people access services.

### Three Wings Trust

The Three Wings Trust is a voluntary organisation based in Richmond upon Thames. They provide a range of services to young disabled people and their families including facilitating a young person's panel which has been meeting for two years.

The 16-strong group of young people working on the issue of disability awareness training are aged between 12 to 21 and have been meeting since the end of 2009 to identify the difficulties they experience when using local mainstream services and facilities and find ways of explaining these to an outside audience. They already have a range of materials in the pipeline including a poster and postcards.

### Background

Young people involved in the Three Wings Trust, Crofters Club (a Local Authority funded service for young disabled people) and other local groups were invited to take part in a Mystery Shopping activity in the borough in 2009 to discover how easy it was for them to access mainstream services. They visited a cinema, sports centres, restaurants, pubs and coffee bars, a gallery and library and reported back to the Richmond multi-agency Transition Steering Group, the Integrated Youth Support Service, Richmond Youth Partnership, Chamber of Commerce and the venues/services visited.

Common themes to come out of the Mystery Shopping experience were that staff sometimes

spoke to the adult accompanying them rather than to the young person themselves and that the young people often experienced difficulty accessing information to make choices or decisions. Staff attitudes are a common problem, with one young person with communication difficulties saying that for her a major issue was not being given enough time in shops, for example, when people rushed her at the check out.

As a result of the recommendations, the Transition Support Programme funded the Three Wings Trust £3,500 to help a group of young people develop training for local organisations and businesses.

Along with young people from other local disability organisations, Three Wings Trust members have taken part in a number of sessions to identify the issues they would like to take up with outside providers. The process began at the end of 2009 and the young people are learning to explore their feelings and experiences in ways that will eventually feed into disability awareness training. The Trust's experience will be shared with participation workers in other boroughs via the Young Londoners Participation Network which meets at City Hall.

### **Aims and Objectives**

Three Wings Trust has a particular commitment to enabling young disabled people to express their views and to participate in shaping their own services. They feel that the work is part of a wider approach of trying to increase access for children and families, especially as young people go through transition.

The process of helping the young people to identify their feelings and views and to express them is as important as the outcomes of greater disability awareness among Richmond services and businesses.

“The broader question of the overall value of disability awareness training is seen in the context of the value for individual young people for whom it is phenomenally significant; all of them get something out of it,” says Three Wings Trust Chief Executive Mark Gilbert.

Restrictions on funding and staffing, the fact that sessions are mainly restricted to evenings and weekends, and the need for time to work through young people's feelings means this is a slow process. Short term aims are to create training materials and to have carried out the first training during 2010. The organisation is realistic about the change it can achieve in the short term. Jess Bool, Children's Events Co-ordinator at Three Wings Trust, points out that a lot of the change that they are aiming for is very low key, involving small changes, but she points out that these can make a real difference. The organisation hopes the training can become a permanent part of the organisation's work.

While they aim to keep it local to start with, working with smaller businesses and organisations in the borough, Three Wings Trust is ambitious and believes that there is future scope for taking it to national organisations with offices, services, shops and franchises in the local area.

### **Approach**

The young people's panel at Three Wings Trust has provided a framework for consulting young people with learning difficulties and supporting them in making their views known. Three Wings Trust is keen for businesses and other services to see young disabled people as consumers with market power. They point out that 15 to 20% of the population has some sort of impairment so disabled people have commercial importance. They also believe that it is just as important that the young people themselves recognise that they have choices.

The first session of the disability awareness training group – all of whom have learning difficulties – was held at the end of 2009 and was quickly followed by a number of further sessions where different ways of expressing their views on local services was explored. Group members are all visually creative and drawing and painting was found to be an effective way of explaining their views and feelings on a number of issues.

These materials are now forming the basis of postcards and a poster which are to be printed by the summer of 2010 and used as training materials when the group meets up with outside

organisations later in the year.

Filming is underway of group members interviewing each other and discussing their experiences for use at a training session. More filming is planned for the Young People's Panel sessions in the Easter and June holidays (2010). The borough Arts Service will be asked to advise on how to get the footage edited into a DVD at a reasonable cost over the summer. The group also wants to develop a website.

Three Wings Trust has identified a number of organisations which already have contact with the charity and where the group's first training sessions can be tried out. A local gallery, for example, has asked for training for its staff and will represent a friendly start for the young people. Using familiar venues should help the young people to build up their confidence.

The intention is for service providers to think about the problems raised by the young people and consider solutions appropriate to their own setting. Building a longer relationship with providers could make disability awareness more of an ongoing strategy for these organisations, in some cases with the young people acting as mentors to them.

## Challenges

Ensuring the work is sustainable is an important consideration so the group cannot become too reliant on any individual or age group. This is one reason that the age group has been extended to take in young people up to 25. Another difficulty is that young people's involvement is often restricted to weekends and evenings so the capacity to deliver training is restricted to these times.

Widening the range of young disabled people taking part in the project in order to provide a rounded view of disability has been a challenge – so far those taking part all have learning difficulties. Through its links with other voluntary organisations in the area, the Trust is aiming to encourage other groups of disabled young people.

Three Wings Trust Chief Executive Mark Gilbert believes that effective partnership

needs to be higher on the agenda in the borough. He is keen to see the Three Wings Trust take a lead by appointing a shadow board with young people providing strategic guidance. Work on disability awareness training is part of the Trust's wider aim of getting the voices of young disabled people heard.

## Successes

The idea of providing training was an alien concept to the young people initially. Very few had been supported to reflect and gain insight into discrimination that impacts on their lives and so working with them to find out their experiences has to be a slow and sensitive process. Many of the disabled young people involved had never spoken to anyone about what having an impairment means to them, so are not even aware that they miss out on anything. However, using different medium such as art has enabled them to express themselves. This is the basis of the training materials that are now in production.

The process has enabled young people to begin understanding that they have choices and to express their feelings about their experiences.

In one case a 12-year-old with SEN was able to describe how she was experiencing bullying in her mainstream school through an art activity involving drawing a story board. In the first picture she drew lots of children pointing at her. She drew herself with a very big heart inside her body; in the next picture children were laughing at her behind the teacher's back; the final picture showed her smiling with a couple of friends. It was a very powerful way for a child who found it difficult to articulate her feelings and experiences to begin talking about them.

The Mystery Shopping exercise successfully identified some of the issues for disabled young people trying to access services. It enabled them to voice the view that they wanted to be treated as individuals in their own right. "Talk to me" – not the accompanying adult was a key message. The disability awareness training is finding ways of getting that message across to service providers and businesses through interviews for the DVD training materials.

## Conclusion

Three Wings Trust is a small charity with big ideas so attracting additional resources is a major challenge in its work to get the voices of young disabled people heard. By involving a group of young people with learning difficulties in putting together disability awareness training, it has already enabled a group that often goes unheard to have their say.

The Trust recognises that it can only move forward through small steps to start with. Working with what young people can do, rather than focussing on their difficulties, has enabled them to effectively put their views through innovative training materials. And by identifying friendly organisations as venues for the first training and trying to widen its group of young participants, it can go on to make changes in how local businesses and services operate. The Trust believes that however small these changes, they can have a major impact on the lives of disabled people in the borough.

Three Wings Trust also believes that there is potential for the training to fit into a wider social enterprise facilitated by the organisation but driven by the young people. While charging for the training is some way off, the aim is that young people will be paid for their work, and businesses may be asked to contribute to the cost.

## Barriers

As with much work on disability issues, the Trust has found that attitudes are at the root of many of the inclusion problems experienced by disabled people. For young disabled people, it is the attitudes of parents and professionals, as much as the attitudes of businesses in the borough, that may create barriers. Both parents and professionals may find it hard to relinquish some control often based on initial poor experiences when supporting young people to access mainstream services. Parents may be motivated by a protective instinct and some young people may feel safe having someone making all their decisions, although others can feel restricted. When young people gain confidence to express their views, this may be seen as challenging, for example, when a young disabled man decided to turn up late to

an event because “you told me I had the choice”.

Three Wings Trust believes that locally the focus of funding is more on parents and what they want rather than on direct involvement of disabled children and young people. It is clearly important to get a balance as parents and young people often have different focuses and views. The Trust believes that there needs to be greater inclusion of disabled young people in local youth and education services. While these may offer services to disabled young people in mainstream settings, these tend to be specialist groups, run parallel to but separate from the mainstream activities.

## Why is developing young disability awareness trainers good practice?

This project is part of a wider approach of enabling young disabled people to identify and express their views, to participate in shaping their own services and to increase access for themselves and their families.

Supporting disabled young people to develop positive self identities may mean going right back to basic feelings and experiences. Many young people have not discussed their impairment before, may have no insight into their circumstances, and may struggle to express their views and feelings.

The project is helping workers, families and young people develop different ways to help young disabled people put their views across. For some young people it will be visual expression, for others it may be writing, speaking etc.

Developing young disabled leaders is crucial in ensuring that disabled people maintain a political presence in service development and wider communities.

Disabled young people will develop transferable skills that will help them with CV's, job interviews and ultimately further professional training and employment.

The project is developing an alternative training model. The training provided by young disabled people may not provide all the answers or explain legal rights and responsibilities. What it

will do is explain their problems and invite solutions from providers, thereby engaging both sides as active partners. The young people have a potential ongoing role as mentors; the providers gain a deeper understanding of how to make their businesses and services genuinely more accessible.

Services become more accessible for all communities, not just disabled young people, e.g. for communities where English may not be a first language, families with young children and elderly people.

### Top Tips

- Prepare parents and carers who may find the empowerment of their child in making choices and expressing opinions a challenging experience.
- Start with friendly organisations and familiar venues.
- Be ready to cope with the consequences of helping young people have their say, for example, when they make their own choices, rather than doing what adults say or when they are enabled to disclose distressing experiences.
- Work at the young people's own pace. This will ensure that young people are able to develop the necessary skills and have time to self reflect which will result in personal development and skill development.

### Key policy and legislation

A new single Equality Act has been passed through Parliament and there is phased implementation starting in October 2010. It aims to streamline the anti-discrimination legislation and will replace separate acts covering discrimination such as The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. The Equality Act creates a new Equality duty on public bodies and should make it easier to prove that a disabled person has been treated less favourably.

Participation is a key element of the Disabled Children's Core Offer made under the Government's Aiming High for Disabled Children programme. This sets out a national statement of expectations for how disabled children and their families will be informed and involved in assessments and services. The Core Offer covers: Information, Transparency, Assessment, Participation and Feedback.

### Useful resources

*Making Ourselves Heard: Exploring disabled children's participation*

Kate Martin, Council for Disabled Children (NCB, 2009)

Based on a series of 8 seminars with local authorities, this book sets out the current policy context for disabled children and young people's participation, outlines the barriers and challenges to effective participation and highlights what is working well. The book can be ordered through NCB: [www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk)

The book is published by the Making Ourselves Heard network based at the Council for Disabled Children:

[www.ncb.org.uk/cdc/networks/making\\_ourselves\\_heard.aspx](http://www.ncb.org.uk/cdc/networks/making_ourselves_heard.aspx)

*How to involve children and young people with communication impairments in decision-making*  
Participation Works and the Council for Disabled Children (NCB, 2008)

Information and ideas about how you can enable children and young people with a range of communication impairments to participate in decisions about their lives. It also includes case studies to illustrate examples of good practice from different settings.

*Young Londoners Participation Network*

YLPN is a pan-London initiative that provides a quarterly forum for participation workers across the capital to share practice and ideas, discuss developments in the field, and offer each other informal professional support and advice.

[www.participationworks.org.uk/networks/regional-networks/london](http://www.participationworks.org.uk/networks/regional-networks/london)

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### **National Transition Support Team (NTST)**

NTST is working alongside the National Strategies and the Child Health and Maternity Partnership to coordinate the delivery of the Transition Support Programme.

NTST is based at the Council for Disabled Children (CDC), the umbrella body for the disabled children's sector in England. CDC is hosted by NCB.

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