

## **Case Study: Thurrock Council (Participation)**

### **Introduction**

**This case study shows how Thurrock Council is using drama as a tool for involving disabled young people in transition planning.**

#### **Overview**

The case study showcases an innovative approach to preparing disabled young people with complex impairments to prepare for transition and complete planning in creative ways. The project also shows how important a role schools have in preparing disabled young people to leave them feeling confident and with aspirations and skills for adulthood. Bringing a range of agencies, young people and families together within this process builds confidence and joint working to ensure successful transitions.

#### **Main transferable learning points**

Joined up working between different agencies makes for better planning.

By using a range of techniques it is possible to introduce complex concepts such as transition to disabled young people with complex and multiple impairments.

Experiential methods often ensure much more meaningful participation than an annual meeting and review.

Disabled young people with complex needs require more time to understand and apply information to their own lives and therefore building in transition into curriculum time is essential if young people are to be able to have their views and aspirations central in the transition process.

Sometimes it's important to step out of your own comfort zone and try something new!

#### **Introduction to Beacon Hill School and the Post 16 Unit**

Beacon Hill School opened in September 2004 and currently operates on two sites. The main site is in South Ockendon and meets the needs of pupils aged 3 to 16 years. The needs of young people aged 16 to 19 are met by the new, purpose built Post 16 Unit situated near Grays. The school and Post 16 Unit cater for students who have profound and complex medical needs. From 2007 Beacon Hill School has been designated "A Special College for Sensory and Physical Needs". In addition the school operates support services for the Local Authority providing risk assessment for pupils with physical needs and services for ICT assessments and an Outreach Service to all schools in Thurrock that require advice on Manual Handling Risks and training issues.

The Post 16 Unit can accommodate 19 young people at any one time; all will have a Statement of Special Educational Needs that is reviewed annually. The curriculum for these particular young people focuses on an individual learning programme that will provide the young person with life skills to support them into adulthood. Students are supported to be as independent as possible and to make their own decisions and choices. Using the Towards Independence ASDAN Award Scheme, all students complete appropriate modules to meet their individual needs.

There are individual modules written to accredit aspects of the following areas of learning:

Independent Living Skills  
Work  
Leisure/Recruitment/Sport  
Cultural

Creative studies  
Personal Development/Citizenship/PSHE

This case study outlines the learning from the Impact Drama Week held in 2009.

### What is Impact?

Impact Universal provides dramatically powerful solutions for organisations across the UK. By promoting lifelong learning, changing behaviours and influencing actions Impact Universal help people to fulfil their potential by tailoring learning and development solutions.

They are based in Leeds in Yorkshire. The company are able to work closely with organisations to provide very individual programmes. They use a wide range of actors who audition for the role and this ensures the actors fit the needs of the programme arranged. They always spend time prior to the drama week meeting the students and staff and discussing our needs/wants for drama week. The actors they employ will have a wide range of skills including signing. This means all students with varying communication needs are fully included.

### What we were trying to achieve

- To demonstrate to staff new ways of working in line with the vision for the development of a new Post 16 provision
- Supporting students to become more independent
- Preparing students for adulthood and separation from school
- Facilitating students make choices
- Empowering students to become more assertive.

### Impact Drama Week at Beacon Hill School

Beacon Hill School have been running Impact Drama workshops since 2006. The Impact Drama week in 2009 was named “Transformation” and took place over five days. Four of the days were spent at Thurrock College and the fifth day was a “celebration day” held at the Beacon Hill School Post 16 Unit where parents, staff and friends were encouraged to visit. The event was aimed at the Key Stage 4 students and the Post 16 students.

Impact Drama week consists of workshops based around the themes of communication, relationships, independent living, decision making, aspirations, choices and respect for themselves and others. In this particular Impact week the focus was on equipping students with the skills they need to cope with any transition in their lives, i.e. for Key Stage 4 students to cope with their move to Post 16 and for Post 16 students to prepare them for their future life after school.

Not only students participated in the workshop. Others were also invited, i.e. Connexions PAs, members of the social care Transition team, parents, college staff and other college students.

### How does Impact Drama week work?

Impact staff visit the Unit prior to the Drama week to get to know the students and to talk to the key members of staff about what we are trying to achieve from the week, and how to work with the student to ensure that each student obtained the maximum benefit from the week. The Impact staff spent time learning about each students and finding out the best way to communicate with each. After these visits Impact audition actors to work with the students and then draft several options for the workshops. The actors have a range of skills including signing and some have worked with us previously so have a good understanding and knowledge of our students’ needs and the expected outcomes from the week.

The first day was a real “setting the scene” and “getting to know you day”. Each day had three

workshops. The first always concentrated on developing a wide range of communication skills that included developing students' self esteem and confidence. They achieved this through games and activities which meant the students had a wide range of experiences and they had lots of fun.

These sessions also gave the staff from Key Stage 4 and Post 16 the opportunity to develop as a working team, improving their communication skills, self esteem and confidence.

Workshop two consisted of a series of "mini plays" where the actors introduced some characters that could be identified by the students and involved them taking part in "The X-factor" auditions. Along the way different scenarios gave the students the opportunity to think about how they would cope and helped develop the skills they would need in life. Some students wanted to take part in these sessions and were supported to do so, other students just wanted to watch. Every student was given the opportunity to participate using thumbs up and down boards and with verbal responses.

The third workshop, afternoon sessions, gave the students the opportunity to be involved in role play situations and in dressing up. This proved to be very popular for the students and staff alike. These sessions also included some simple art type work that gave the students something more tangible to see and own.

On the fifth day, Friday, we held a "celebration day" at the Post 16 Unit. Parents, friends and visitors were all invited to see a short celebratory presentation showing the students' experiences during the Impact Drama workshops. The afternoon proved to be very entertaining and enjoyable for the students and all involved. "Impact" presented each student with a participation certificate. This proved to be a truly memorable afternoon for all involved.

## **The challenges for both the students and staff:**

### **What problems did you encounter?**

Students "gelled", mixed and adapted to their surroundings very quickly. However, for staff it was not quite the same. Using the college as a venue causes lots of extra work for staff initially as we have to take lots of equipment with us. It also means that staff are not working in the school environment and are working with other professionals that they may not have the opportunity to do so under normal circumstances. Staff from KS4 and P16 unit worked very independently on day one, but we all worked very hard at mixing staff and by Wednesday the whole group of TA's were working as a team.

### **What would you do differently next time?**

More joint preparation work with KS4 and P16 students together, as at the start of the process the students and staff saw themselves as two distinct groups rather than working together as a team.

Some more focused activities in the build up to the week so that students were better prepared at the beginning of the week and could gain maximum benefit from this.

More time briefing staff on expectations might have led to better engagement on the first day.

Perhaps extend this with more involvement from parents and families in preparing for the week so that there is the opportunity for students to transfer skills learnt during the week into their day to day situations.

It was a huge benefit to the students to work with new and unfamiliar staff in terms of the Impact actors. In order to extend this further in future it might be nice to involve other groups of students such as college peers or from similar schools in order to develop new friendships within this context.

Make sure that multi agency staff from Connexions and Transition team have the opportunity to see the work in action.

## What did you achieve?

Students that do not usually join in such activities were, by the middle of the week, taking part and seemed to understand what was happening. Since the workshops, all students seem to have shown improved communication skills, including better eye contact and being more assertive. It has encouraged students to make comments and not feel like they are going to be put down by each other.

We have been impressed each time we have worked with Impact on their ability to pitch the work at the student's level. They have been able to recognise changing ability and the maturity of our students but have still shown them respect and consideration.

The staff that were involved have also been through a "transformation". The work has made them more aware of how important it is to listen to students no matter how they are communicating their thoughts and feelings. It made staff realise students need time to respond. The workshop helped staff to learn to work closer with colleagues and specifically staff from KS4 and P16 are now working much better as a team, due to changes within the school week and college days and the opportunities for joint team work throughout the school year.

It gave staff a chance to have fun with the students and each other, developing good working practices across two working teams.

## The future

The 2009 (and 2010) Impact Drama weeks have been funded from the Transition Support Programme grant and, having seen the benefits for our students, we will be looking at ways of including young people from other schools, building on the outcomes of the workshop and securing sustainability for such events in the future.

## Feedback from the students

"I really liked the actors, I liked being able to take part in the X Factor.....I would like to be an actor." Michelle

"I get very embarrassed but I did like joining in when we were dressing up. The actors made me think about what I would do when I leave soon." Emma

"This is the best week I have had at school, can I do some more please?" Anthony

## Feedback from staff supporting young people with complex communication requirements

"Thomas just laughed and had fun the whole week. He was able to give lots of thumbs up signs and showed excellent concentration. He loved his mum and sister coming to watch him on the Friday."

"Nathan gave a big thumbs up sign when asked if he liked the games."

"Hassan found some of the week difficult but enjoyed joining in with the animal games and the games where he could walk around the circle."

"Brandon liked meeting the actors and wearing wigs."

"Zach was laughing and very keen to join in the activities all the week. He really enjoyed working with the actresses."

## Policy

### **Growing Up Matters**

Better transition planning for young people with complex needs (Commission for Social Care Inspection, 2007).

### **National service framework for children, young people and maternity services**

(Department of Health, 2004):

Standard 4: Growing up into adulthood.

Standard 8: Disabled children and young people and those with complex needs.

Standard 9: Promoting the mental health and psychological well-being of children and young people.

### **Transition: getting it right for young people**

Improving the transition of young people with long term conditions from children's to adult health services (Department of Health, 2006).

The white paper **Valuing People** set out the Government's vision for people with a learning disability, across a range of services based on four key principles of rights, independence, choice, and inclusion. (Department of Health, 2001).

## Legislation

### **Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learners Act 2009**

Responsibility for the funding and organisation of 16-19 education and training transferred to local authorities from the Learning and Skills Council.

Includes the responsibility for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities up to the age of 25 and is supported by the Young People's Learning Agency for England (YPLA) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA)

### **Learning and Skills Act 2000**

Section 139A: Local authorities now responsible for ensuring learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are assessed in their final year of compulsory schooling.

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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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