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JUST ASK! YOUNG RESEARCHERS NETWORK EVALUATION

Just Ask! Vision

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*The conclusions reached in this research report are held by Just Ask! and
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Just Ask! Vision

When conducting this piece of research, Just Asks! aim was to share their stories on everyday issues that have an impact on their daily lives. We did this to enable people to gain a better understanding and raise awareness of the underlying (and often overlooked) personal and emotional issues which impact upon our lives. Often the main focus is on the physical and generic aspects to disabilities; we wanted to achieve this by designing the following question:

"What do you want to share about your life experiences and aspirations that will help to challenge stereotypes of 'Disability' and support society to see your 'abilities'?"

How We Did It

The young people felt that even though they liked their original research question, it was quite a large open question, and it would be easier to explore if it was broken down in to smaller more specific strands. They also decided that they would have three questions that they themselves would answer. Alongside this the young people also felt that it would be a good idea to try and include the experiences of other young people both with and without a disability.

At the time the Just Ask! group were creating links with two other young peoples' groups in the region. However, although the group did develop a plan with roles and responsibilities for the day including the filming for the DVD, the group feedback to the workers from the young people – on the day-was that there was just too much happening on the day in terms of activities, new experiences gained, and processing all of the new and/or different emotions raised from the day itself.

As a result, the young people decided that as a group that they would rewrite their questions and put them in to three categories:

- The good
- The bad
- The future

Once they had done this they then went on to seek a new partnership with the media trust's mentoring programme; through this link the young people went on to build a positive working relationship with their mentor who was supporting them through this process. During this time the young people continued to develop a wide range of skills such as:

- Questioning
- Verbal and written communication
- Creative thinking
- Planning
- Interpersonal skills
- Problem solving
- Researching through observation (Different types of filming/visual effects in the media)

In preparation for the groups filming of their research they decided to have a group discussion with the support team and mentor to develop an individual session plan for each session that included targets that needed to be achieved at the end of each session; as a way to support the group as a whole to stay focused.

The young people then decided on a range of different activities they could do together to feel more relaxed and confident leading up to and during the filming process. As members of the group had shared that even though they had made a DVD before, they had mixed emotions ranging from being scared about what they would look like, and what people might think about them after they watched the DVD, to being really excited because they had a lot that they wanted to share even if they were a little bit nervous. The group coping strategies came from

- Group discussions
- Test filming
- Mock interviews
- Preparing answers
- Mini test scripts
- Costumes

- Freedom to experiment with costumes, props, and dialogue (statements) prior to filming
- Researching different types of filming techniques from films, DVDS' and TV (Big brother for example)

The Learning

What did we as workers' learn from this research process?

As workers' going through this research process I believe that there was two similar but slightly different levels of learning happening at the same time in terms of building up and strengthening new working relationships; while maintaining a significant level of meaningful participation by young people, and staying true to the overall projects core values.

Our learning with the young people

- Learning to share the space & time for the different types of conversations, that can come out of asking the young people to share a life experience with other; for some individuals it maybe the first time they have being asked this directly, requiring sometime to build up their confidence to do so.
- Supporting the young people to communicate in a variety of ways for filming,
- How to un-pack the emotional barriers the young people are experiencing when expressing themselves, while reassuring them that they are in a safe space and in control of their contribution to the process.
- How you can pre-plan something, but once the camera starts rolling; it is what is on their mind at that moment in time in its rawest form that comes out.
- The therapeutic sense of being able to "GET IT OUT THERE AND NOT BE JUDGED".

The learning I believe we gained from this process as workers is that we need to be able to have the courage, flexibility, and protected space to really share and work out possible solutions together in relations to our concerns, and challenges experienced whilst working on the project; both internally and externally. For this may then support all involved to have a clearer and more tangible understanding, and enable them to assess the practical

implications it will have on their existing work load; as well as managing any unforeseen changes.

Challenges

Some of the challenges we experienced during the project were as follows

- Encouraging the ownership & honesty about the emotions being shared
- To the young people to focus on their good experiences and achievements, as well as the bad
- To be more open and explore the idea of a positive future
- To communicate and support a better level of understanding of "youth led" work between the young people, and the people they are working with
- Managing the unexpected i.e. technical difficulties with equipment & replacing it

Ethical Issues

There were also ethical issues' that we faced as workers when supporting the young people through this Action Research process. One of these was around the security of our equipment and test run data, as the only memory card we had at the time went missing when locked away with other equipment.

Another issue was in maintaining a high quality level of support to (some of) the young people when they will not take responsibility or ownership, for some of the less interesting aspects that are involved in this type of work and the blame that they put on, you (the worker) for this when things did not go to plan or finish at the targeted time.

It was also challenging explaining to the young people how they are still meeting the original aims of their project and at the same time fulfilling the requirements of their new commitments, as many felt that the research was taking them away from their groups original vision and goal; however as a group they decided to make a commitment to carry out this piece of work, and know

that as a group of young adults that signed a contract they must then honour that commitment.

Conclusion

I think that as is true of all Action Research the end product cannot be defined by the initial question. The journeys and stories that happen throughout the research help to shape and develop the research to a more raw and true piece of work that hasn't been diluted but that has come straight from the researchers themselves, the young people who are experiences the issues they have researched on a daily basis.

I think that in hindsight the young people will re-evaluate their workloads and commitments in future based upon their underestimation of the level of commitment and effort a project like this has taken.

The end result although broken down into three more specific strands of the original question is a raw and true account of the experiences of these young people and gives the viewer of their DVD a fresh and unusual insight into their stories and journeys. Hence producing an original raw and powerful piece of research planned, researched and produced by young people.