



SEX & RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION

Talking about sex and relationships with young people has got a lot easier thanks to this innovative project which saw young people from seven schools in Dudley work with artists to creatively explore issues associated with risky behaviours.

Dudley experiences a high rate of teenage pregnancies, and evidence suggests that a high percentage of young people are involved in risky behaviour. This project worked with artists to develop a Sex and Relationships educational resource for young people and teachers working in Dudley.



The Project Plan

The project was delivered in two stages. During the first stage, the young people were appointed as co-creators of the resource pack. They were encouraged to consider what approach works best in promoting public health messages associated with sex and risky behaviours to their peer group, whilst at the same time learning more themselves. During the second stage of the project, the resource pack, which is based upon young people's ideas and creative work, was piloted in schools throughout the area. The evaluation explored whether the project enabled participants to:

- Think about issues around sex and relationships and risky behaviour
- Identify difficult and risky situations they may face
- Gain skills to help deal with difficult and risky situations.



The Steering Group

NHS Dudley has a long history of using the arts to promote important health messages, in particular through the use of theatre, as they have found this helps engage young people and helps teachers tackle sensitive subjects. However, previously the team had not involved young people in the development of the work. This project also trialled the use of a broader range of art forms. The project was led by Kath Clarke (Respect Yourself Campaign Coordinator - Health Promoting Schools) and involved Caroline Rose (Brooks- Sandwell and Dudley), Kate Gant (praXis Arts and Health Network) and RSE leads in schools. Kath's role involves working in partnership with both primary and secondary schools to develop and support the delivery of relationship and sex education (RSE). praXis is managed by Creative Health, and the projects were funded in partnership with Arts Council England's Grants for the Arts awards.



Respect Yourself Campaign

The project formed part of the Respect Yourself campaign. This is a campaign intended to influence all agencies that work with young people to use their resources to enable young people to make informed choices about their sexual health and improve the life chances of teenage parents and their children. The Respect Yourself Campaign works in partnership with Children's Centres and Connexions to ensure that appropriate support for young parents and their children is available, according to need, in line with the Every Child Matters Framework.



Creative Practitioners

Urban Voice were appointed to work on the project. They are a participatory arts organisation, which works with specialist creative practitioners covering a range of art forms, and have experience in using participatory art to engage young people in tackling sensitive issues. Seven schools took part in the project- Hillcrest, Holly Hall, Windsor High, Redhill, Crestwood, Pedmore, and High Arcal. As part of the project each school was invited to take part in a day of creative activities that would engage young people in discussion about sex and relationship issues and involve artists working with young people to create resources and ideas for the final resource pack.

A representative from Urban Voice and the Sex and Relationships Co-ordinator hosted initial preparation visits with the schools. This helped ensure practical arrangements were in place to enable a maximum amount of young people to participate in the project, and that the young people were informed about the project and able to ask questions and submit ideas during the planning stages.



The Workshop Days

Projects ran for a day in each participating school. Each workshop day began with a group session for young participants that informed them about the project. Young people either chose or were selected to join different working groups, each of which was tasked to produce a piece of work. Artists visited each school, each focusing upon a different art form including creative writing, visual arts, film, photography and digital media. Each group was briefed to experiment with the art form as well as discuss issues associated with sex and risky behaviours. Whilst all of the artists were briefed in the key issues and messages, a specialist health advisor was available on the days to answer specific questions. By the end of the day groups had produced resources and ideas, which could be used in the resource pack.

Workshop days were intensive, with each group being given a brief to fulfill. This produced positive results. Teachers from the schools identified that the work had a positive impact on the young people. Comments from teachers included, "It gave the young people a chance to express themselves in topics they don't have the chance to normally, and gives them more confidence" and "The pupils were engaged with the topics, came up with great ideas and great work".

The young people were keen to participate and engage in discussion about the topic, and levels of creativity were high. Evidence from the voting sheets which the young people used to assess the sessions showed that young people felt that they had learned about issues and alternative strategies for dealing with issues associated with risky behaviours. Creative outcomes included scripts for radio plays covering topics including being tested for STDs and dealing with difficult relationship, photography images and promotional messages exploring the impact of alcohol on relationships and drama and role-play exploring how to tackle sensitive issues.



The high levels of productivity excited the artists, all of whom were pleased that the young people engaged in the topic. They did this whilst facing a number of challenges. Having never met the young people previously, meant that they sometimes had to be careful about how they engaged in conversations regarding potentially sensitive subjects. The artists identified that it was important to build up trust with the young people.

The pressure to produce work in one day meant that everyone was required to work intensively and for some young people this was a challenge. The volume of work produced also presented challenges in terms of selection and organisation into a final resource for schools.

The learning, which has emerged from this project, demonstrates there is an opportunity to use the production process for public health promotional and educational resources, as a promotional tool in its own right. The focus of the task ensured the young people remained committed to the workshop, and as they wanted to achieve a high standard in their creative work they also appreciated that this needed to be effective to influence young people's behaviours. The young people approached the topic with a fresh perspective and pushed boundaries in terms of creativity producing sensitive and thought provoking work.



The Resource Pack

The resource pack is being trialled in schools during the 2011 winter term. Young people who took part in the production stage will be engaging in focus groups to review the final product and also to consider how their participation in the project has influenced how they deal with risky situations in relation to sex and relationships. The project will also monitor the response of teachers and young people who use the resource pack to consider whether a co-produced resource about sex and relationships is more effective in making young people forming health relationships.

More information about the Respect yourself campaign can be found **HERE**