



Tipton Young Parents

Contact:

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Young People

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Artists

Kirsty Hillyer and Rich
Franks

PRIMARY OUTCOME FOR TIPTON YOUNG PARENTS:

Engage and involve
participants in ongoing
activity

OTHER OUTCOMES FOR THE PROJECT:

Access communities in
the Black Country

Develop confidence
among participants

Develop health and arts
sector awareness of the
value of using the arts to
engage with communities

The Teenage Pregnancy Support Service runs the Tipton Young Parents Group, which is part of Children and Young Peoples Services at Sandwell MBC. The Service is responsible for delivering sex and relationships education, contraceptive services and support services for local expectant teenagers and young parents. The Tipton group meets every week and is based in Tipton Children's Centre. It enables young parents to access and take up opportunities that would not normally be made available to them through a rolling programmes of activities.

The 'What is Happiness?' workshops were held as part of the group's summer programme. Everyone on the group was female, under 25 and classed themselves as 'White British'. Artists worked with the group on two intensive day-long sessions on 24th and 25th August 2009.

What is Happiness?

Attendance and Initial Response

Initially members of the group were not sure how they would decorate a house, at this stage Nikki felt that it might have been more appropriate for two people to work together to complete a house. Once the group started to talk about the theme ideas started to flow and the women were keen to complete a house each. Nikki felt the artists were very supportive and the structure of the project was good. She felt that spending two days together

focusing on happiness was an excellent way of exploring the difficult and complex issues of self esteem and confidence, enabling members of the group to develop a wide range of ideas. One member of the group wanted to challenge the negative attitude that some people have about teenage mums and used the opportunity to celebrate the choice she had made and show the positive things about being a parent. Another person used her house to illustrate dreams, travel plans and aspirations for the future.



The Process

Over a short period of time the artists got to know the group and supported them to turn their thoughts, feelings and ideas them into 'happiness homes'. The Teenage Pregnancy Support Service supported the young parents to fully participate in the project by providing a venue and childcare. Nikki, their support worker also participated in the workshops.

Challenges

Time was an issue for the group, yet having a couple of days to complete their houses proved to be a positive motivational force. At one point in the workshop one of the young women was calming her young son with one hand and finishing painting her home with the other. A crying toddler could have been an appropriate excuse to stop but she was determined to complete her house so it could be included in the final exhibition.



Benefits

Participating in the workshop was a positive experience for everyone concerned. Nikki felt that the artists 'really empowered' members of the group enabling them to use some 'tricks of the trade' to project photographs on to their cardboard houses and trace a part of the image. This meant they could really develop their ideas and create beautiful 'homes' they were justifiably proud of.

Being part of a larger project was important for the group and they attended the exhibition launch at The Public. Leanne Plant and Kylie McCaulsky represented the group by giving a short speech. The young women confidently described the workshops to an audience of over 70 people.

They talked about their reaction to the theme:

"we really didn't know what to think at first..."

and their amazement at the end result:

"we really never thought we could do it".



Conclusion



Reflecting on the project Nikki was keen to use the experience as a way of involving the young parents in on going activities. Members of the group are encouraged to go back to college to learn new skills or receive training. Some of the parents are completing their 'Introduction to Youth Work' qualification. Nikki felt that the workshops could be developed by members of the group as a way of raising and discussing issues with other young people who are facing the challenges of being pregnant and bringing up their children. She is keen to develop this idea by working with the artists to develop a "What is Happiness?" Housing Kit which could then be used as part of their Peer Mentor Programme:

"I would love to do something like that. Supporting the parents to pass on the confidence and skills they gained from the project and give them a chance to talk to others about what being a parent means to them, would be great. Doing it creatively might mean that other parents are more likely to think about issues and take things on board"
