

Woodland Youth Initiative, Park Road, Kelvinbridge, Glasgow

Introduction

The Woodland Youth Initiative is situated in the west end of Glasgow and targets a fairly high representation of black and minority ethnic young people living in the area.

This youth initiative works with groups of young people who may have become disenfranchised with the mainstream schooling system, who have various degrees of behavioural problems or are disruptive within mainstream school.

The young people are mainly teenagers aged between 12 – 18 years old.

There are youth workers and a sports development worker who use group working techniques and sports to help these young people challenge issues such as racism and sectarianism as well as the promotion of health, physical and mental well being.

The project is a prominent community focus for young people and adults alike and has a particularly striking shop front that has become a focal point for challenging prejudice of all descriptions.

Anti-sectarian and anti-racist culture in Woodland Youth Initiative

The team are extremely committed to spreading an anti-racist message in partnership with the Glasgow Anti-Racist Alliance and have a great deal of literature and resources geared towards the promotion of equality for all. The issue of sectarianism is addressed very much in conjunction with prejudice as a whole and the young people are encouraged to explore and investigate the issues in group work sessions.

In this instance four groups of approximately twelve young people in each group were asked to participate in a programme dissecting and unpacking sectarian discrimination but not just from the Catholic/Protestant perspective but also in terms of other faiths with a

particular focus on Islamophobia. The youth workers felt that there was a real need to discuss what anti-sectarianism really means in a modern, multi-faith Glasgow and to have an honest, frank discussion regarding 'hate' words. This was facilitated by the use of case studies or news reports often downloaded from the web to give a real life perspective on issues and how they affect everyday living. The young people were often surprised, dismayed or incensed to learn of the inequalities experienced not just by their faiths or communities but throughout a whole cross section of religions and societies. The workshops, incorporating discussion and interaction, were an excellent precursor to the understanding of discrimination as a blanket term but more importantly to highlight that discrimination can be extremely subtle as well as being an incredibly complicated issue. The workers felt that this underpinning knowledge was essential before the young people used the new web resource as a tool for further exploration.

The youth workers were very keen to pinpoint similarities between differing cases of religious prejudice in various religions in terms of the actual social or emotional stress and the negative or often destructive effects of direct and indirect discrimination.

The positive outcomes in terms of social, personal and emotional development are as stated:

- Building individual and community capacity
- Exploration of Anti-sectarianism and Anti-racism
- Discussion of feelings and experience
- Promotion of equality across all races and religions
- Identifying issues of sectarianism in society and crime
- Increased participation and self development
- The development of a young peoples charter
- A clearer understanding of where and how sectarianism exists and the effects of oppression on people

The project workers are extremely focused and passionate about addressing discrimination of all kinds and had to undertake a great deal of research and preparatory work in order to make the workshops a success. This was coupled with the incorporation of many of the ideas and activities from the new web resource which helped encourage the young people to address their own prejudices and the prejudices of others.

Good Practice Indicators

Indicators	Woodland Youth Initiative Project
Openly acknowledge the existence of religious and sectarian bigotry and discrimination regardless of faith, religious belief or ethnic make-up of their school/community population	The workers who worked on the project are committed to challenging all forms of bigotry and discrimination. There is a culture of tolerance and respect in the Woodlands initiative for all religions, beliefs and ethnicities. This is highlighted by the ongoing commitment by the project to addressing the issues and the delivery of anti-discriminatory workshops to all existing and future groups.
Actively challenge the expression and effects of religious and sectarian bigotry and discrimination	The Woodlands initiative was extremely focused on challenging all derogatory language whether this be racist or sectarian and making it clear there is no distinction between 'soft' abuse and 'hate' words of any kind. All terms which cause 'hurt or anger' were categorised as either racist or sectarian and therefore inappropriate.
Use a range of activities, methods and processes to equip learners, the school and the wider community to challenge religious and sectarian bigotry and discrimination	The activities adopted by the initiative were deemed to be successful in a group working context utilising games, case studies, discussion points and a focus through sport. The twin concepts of sectarianism and racism were unpacked and the harm and destruction they can cause in the wider community was explored to the extent where the young people were no longer reacting to the issue but felt that they needed to 'do something' to address the issue on a wider scale.

Provide opportunities for learners and participants to find ways to build a community/society that includes on an equal footing people of all faiths and denominations of no faith	The participants initially guided by the workers to set the scene for the self-led and peer-led learning focused on a multi-faith approach investigating inter and intra faith case studies and real life examples. This gave the learner a broad seat from which to dissect and examine the commonalities between differing cases of discrimination and to come to the conclusion that discrimination is a widespread issue and not just focused on localised or personal issues. This raised the awareness of global inequalities and set the agenda for change.
Adopt a mainstreaming approach to the issue so that the work is not 'bolt-on' or 'one-off'	The youth workers are committed to working with all existing and future groups to ensure that young people have an open mind regarding other cultures, religions and ethnicities.
Is linked in policy to other aspects of the work of the school or project – e.g. tied into their anti-bullying and equality and fairness policies, teaching and learning policy etc.	The initiative works in partnership with G.A.R.A. and Show Racism the Red Card in order to bolster the anti-racist and anti-sectarian message. This has resulted in the shop front being utilised as a large anti-racist campaign by the young people who were involved in the initial pilot project. This is the type of community action that the young people felt compelled to initiate after exploring the issues in depth.

To find out more about the Woodlands Initiative, contact Saisal Yusuf, Woodland Youth Initiative, Park Road, Kelvinbridge, Glasgow
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