



Introduction to Working with Young People

A youth worker's experience

Now 19 and at university, Kasem first came across The Factory workers in the early days of the project.

Kasem

I would just be out normally with my mates, walking around, and bump into these two guys. They just said hello to us, really. We didn't know who they are, why they're saying hello to us, they're just saying hello to us. And from that point they'll come every Tuesday nights, between 7 to 9, and we'll know exactly where to meet them, because they'll come and find us. We used to hang around where we normally hang around, the factory, the chippie, the shop. They knew the area quite well by then. So, they'd come and bump into us, and they'll just talk to us, they'll just listen to us, what we have to say. And they were really interested in what we do.

Five years on, Kasem is now an experienced part-time worker on the project.

As a detached worker, one of the skills you need is, you need to be able to approach people. Because if you're going to walk around the streets, people won't approach you because it might be the first time they've seen you, you need to approach them straightaway, and to be friendly. Because if you're not friendly, they'll just tell you to, you know, move away from their territory. Because we are entering their territory, and we have to play along with their rules, it's their area.

Kasem's good communication skills were an important factor when he got the job.

Kasem

Communication is the key to success for detached youth work, because without communicating you're not getting anywhere. As well as they listen to us, we have to listen to them, because if we don't listen to them, what's the point of youth work? Another key is, you have to be a very good listener, active listening. You have to be able to listen to their needs, respond to their needs. One thing you have to do, as a detached worker, you have to leave spaces for just not do anything, just go on the streets and have conversations, because from these conversations, that's where you build up and then that's where you say, 'so, where are we going with this conversation? What can we do to change things?' And then you'll put that into the programme activity.

Activities in the programme range from nights out at the cinema to week long expeditions to the Welsh mountains.

I love the people in the community who perhaps have five brothers and sisters in the family. Their parents might not be able to afford to give them enough spending money for them to go out and enjoy themselves. A lot of them don't have the time, as well. So, if they go on a trip with us, we can get it for a lot cheaper, and not only that, we help them to have a good time and also we enjoy it ourselves.

It's important for workers to be aware of issues that parents might have with programme activities.

Kasem

For instance, when we done a sexual health workshop, on the consent forms, we didn't put 'sex education,' because parents might feel, 'well, you know, what is this?' So, we put 'sexual health and young people', just to disguise that little part, because parents in the Asian community, they're challenging, so we have to always work around the parents or sometimes work with the parents, by letting them know, by doing little fliers for them, so they can see that we are actually taking them to this trip, not what they want to think we're taking them.

The Factory also gives members opportunities to voice their social concerns.

We've had a meeting with the police, all that stop and search, which was a huge issue with the factory members, who were facing racism from school, from teachers at the school. They felt they weren't being treated fairly by the police. They were telling us about how they were singled out by the police. If a group of big group of Asian lads were walking, they'd be stopped, so they were saying, 'why should we be stopped? How are we different to anyone else? Why are we being treated unfairly?' So, that's when we invited the police from Loughborough Station and we put them on the spot, like. And the members had an excellent conversation with the police. They got to know more about the stop and search procedures and, after that, well, they saw it as the police didn't know about the stop and search procedures, they told the superintendent, 'so, if you told us all this about stop and search, all these guidelines, how come your police force don't follow these? We've experienced that.'

If no special activities are planned, Kasem, Akkas and Andrew walk their regular route every Tuesday night.

Kasem

Last night was a very good night, because we got – all the members suddenly came to the Moira Centre. It was a better turn-out than expected considering it was kind of late, it gets cold and it gets dark. Therefore, we didn't get a lot of the younger members who wouldn't perhaps come out in the dark. There were three youth workers there, we had various conversations with various people on different issues.

One of these conversations raised a familiar concern.

Kasem

One of the members approached me by saying, 'you know, all the police meeting, everything we had last year?' I went, 'yeah.' He's like, 'guess what?' 'What?' 'They're doing the same again,' they were singled out again and they were picking on us, they pushed some of us out of the way, and like, okay, so, he was like, 'oh, we've had all this in the past. It did calm down for a little while, now it's back again.' So, he was telling me about his views about them. He was telling me how things like college are getting better. One of his worries was, with all the fights and racism at his college, that was affecting his education. And he's saying that he's happy now that everything's calmed down, he can concentrate on his education more.

With the older members, as sometimes happens, Kasem's age put him in a difficult position.

At the glass factory, we met a group of members who were older, slightly older. Some of them were older than me and some of them, who I had challenging conversations, my age, my year group. One of the members approached me with an issue about homosexuality, and he was – I got the feeling he was putting me to the test rather than – he was asking me about my issues and how I felt and why I felt – and I asked him the same back, as well.

Group Member

In religion, it doesn't – no, in Islam, it doesn't say to be against gays.

The dynamic could have become threatening.

Kasem

He started to raise his voice slightly. He was using more body language, he was using more hand movements, and he was getting more and more deep into the conversation. Well, there was a sign also his friends were backing off and, I don't know, I think he got – he was raising his voice, and that's when he was really getting into it and he was really deep about his feelings and thoughts. That's when I said, 'these are my opinions, these are my views, you've got your opinions, you've got your view,' and then I think that's the stage where we left it.

Group Member

How can people be born gay?

Kasem

No one said they were born gay.

Group Member

You said that they discovered that they were gay.

As a member of the team, workers offer support to one another.

Kasem

I was glad my colleague was there, who also backed me up, and he would, you know, step in from time to time, and the members probably felt threatened, they told him to back off, because they were me questions and not him. But he felt he needed to support me, anyway, so I was glad he did.