



Introduction to Working with Young People

Education with a Difference

Sue Quinn is the manager of Madcap Arts Project.

Sue

Well, Madcap's an arts project, basically, although it's based on this fantastic building, it is actually a project. And, for many years, since 1987, has worked with young people, and that's its main remit, aged 14 to 25, on introducing them to the arts and the benefits of the arts. So, because it's partly funded by the Youth Service in Milton Keynes Council, we're given a specific remit to work with young people, and, very informally, educate in the arts.

Young people come to Madcap because it offers something different.

We differ in the way that a lot of the young people we work with probably wouldn't even walk into a youth centre, or probably don't even know where the local one is, to be honest with you. So, they come along because they want to do something different. And Madcap has always been seen as a place where young people can do things and get away with them, but actually, do things that are on the edge, maybe, that you couldn't do in a formal setting. So that when they come here, it's a sense of ownership when they come in, they own the project that they're working on.

Individual young people are referred to Madcap by agencies such as YOP, Connexions and out-of-school projects.

We're normally contacted by a key worker, who thinks, 'oh, this will be a great idea for my young person to do this.' But the young person might not think that, you know, they might be just sort of, 'oh well, we've got to do something so we'll come along.' And these projects don't work unless the young people want to do them, because you can just be banging your head against a brick wall sometimes. So, we meet with them and sort of say, 'well, these are the opportunities, are you interested?' And nine times out of ten they say, 'yeah, I am interested, and I'd like to come along.' And that's how it starts, sort of like on the first step of the ladder, if you like, of coming along, and then it just grows from there.

Steve

So, you want actually, like, do a DJ set and record it?

Group Member

Yeah.

Steve

That's cool. Actually, that's very easy to do and we can do a lot of that.

Multi-agency projects like Reaching Out give groups of young people their first experiences of what Madcap has to offer.

Sue

Reaching Out is a multiagency approach, and it's something that Madcap hasn't necessarily been involved with before. So, it's involved negotiating with Connexions, Youth Service, Careers. And it's bringing our expertise into those organisations, as well as theirs into ours. It's different from the way Madcap usually works, because Madcap projects are usually open and so anyone can come in and join in, whereas, obviously, Reaching Out is targeted to the 'NEET' 16 to 19 group. But it fits within our aims and objectives because it's about, again, giving opportunity, it's about young people getting access to the music project, to the IT, creative IT projects. Maybe even into the other things like dance and drama that happens here.

Steve

And at the point where they start to lose interest, you have to suddenly give them something else. That's what I'm finding.

When working with other agencies, it's important to agree roles and objectives in advance.

Sue

And when you're working with other agencies, you've got to remember, those other agencies are doing it because it's their job, they've got a role to fulfil, they've got to tick their boxes, the same as I do. So, it is a question of being absolutely clear whose role – who's delivering what bit, what are the agreements before you start. Because the worse thing you can do is have two workers who start arguing in front of young people about, 'well, actually, these are my outputs.' 'No, these are my outputs.' So, you have to make sure you agree those in advance. We had an issue last year where, at the end of the Reaching Out project, an evaluation was written by one of the partners and actually given out without us seeing the evaluation. So, it was very difficult for us to then say to funders, 'well, this was our view on it.' And they said, 'but, ah, we've got the evaluation here.' So, that's what we've been very clear on this time around that, you know, no evaluation will be given out until all the partners have agreed on it.

Like many youth projects, Madcap is always on the look-out for people with the skills needed for working with young people.

What I've tended to do over the past two years is whenever we're running projects, you have those key workers in place that you know are good. And we also seek the funding for assistance, so that actually you're building the capacity. Because we're all knocking on a bit now, quite a few of us, and we need new young people coming on board, having learned those skills. They may have the skills within the art form, of music or whatever, like with Gawaine, he's got the musical skills but he hasn't had the skills of actually working with young people in the community. And that's what the opportunity is giving him here, to actually learn those skills.

Madcap's expectations are geared very much to the personal development of the young people that pass through its doors.

When it comes to learning outcomes, I think it's about how each individual grows, when they come in to the building. To see young people coming in, taking a sense of ownership of a project, being able to come to us and say 'we actually think this', 'we would like to do this'. Those are the learning outcomes, it is this thing about, it's not tangible. We can't actually say, you know, at 3 o'clock this afternoon this happened, you know, and it was great. We probably could, if we thought about it, but it's a process, and it is about process. The thing that I've always maintained is that young people want to be proud of what they do. So our part of it is encouraging them through the process, but making sure that when they stand up, when they sing a song, when they just go and collect their certificate and show people what they've done, they're proud of it. At the end of the day, its learning outcomes are what everyone sets themselves, whatever they set themselves to do and they achieve it. That's the outcome. They should be proud of it, we should be proud of it.