The Open University

Growing up with Disability

PLUS - Belonging

Susan Rodger

Youth inclusion project was developed to encourage young people's disabilities to access mainstream clubs and groups. I think it's important they attend clubs like everybody else.

They should be allowed to have that sense of belonging in these organisations without having to have their mum perhaps going along with them.

Vanessa is the oldest child in her family. She's got two younger brothers and her younger brothers are very active.

Lorraine

To us, to family, Vanessa's the same as her brothers in as much as you know she's a child, she deserves the same opportunities, she deserves the same opportunities in life. That's why we wanted her to go to Guides and we want her to do sport and we want her to do activities. She might act in some ways younger than, than her years and because she has a lack of speech, I think it's hard for some people to think, oh crikes, I don't know what she's talking about and. But if you kind of, just able to take a couple of steps back and think about a younger child or think about the behaviour that she's displaying. Is it so way-out? It's not that different from that would be displayed by other children. I think you can begin to just accept her as a child.

Susan

This one's quite a loud one.

When the girls do this game with the hockey. Is that a happy one? Will they get sick? Can you play with the little ball? Yeh? Is it good or is it bad?

(Interspersed with girl's replies but not poss to transcribe).

You show us – what do you think? Yeh. Cos there's too many people running. They run really fast. Yeh? It's a bit scary isn't it?

Marie Muir

There are groups of 6 girls in the Guide Unit core patrols and Vanessa is a member of a patrol and she's, she is a member of that group. It's daunting for any 10 year old to come to a group of 36 girls who are as old as 15. It's been helpful to me to see how the girls have supported Vanessa and how they've included Vanessa and I think that's, that's been a surprise to me, really how inclusion works in that way. Rather than the support purely coming from the adults.

Susan

It's helped Vanessa to develop a sense of independence. She is only young but she is quite an independent strong spirited child. She, to the extent, that when she arrives at Guides, she won't even let mum come out the car to walk her in at the moment, she walks in herself.

Badge work. We have to sit down at the table.

Yeh, we do, that's what they tell us all the time. What side do you think it goes to?

Hey?

(Interspersed with Vanessa's replies)

What do you think?

Yeh, it is a kind of sad one.

Lorraine
If you see her body language, when she walks in, and she's walking up high and her shoulders are back and she's walking in and she thinks she's the bee's knees. And she's saying bye to her brothers and you know, they're quite high because they think it's great that their sister's doing the same things as any other girls and that's really important for their self-esteem too. It's, it speaks volumes. I think it's a struggle to get a child like Vanessa involved in just normal activities, usually because of people's attitudes, because that attitude can be based on fear, it can be based on ignorance, it can be based on a whole variety of reasons, but it was a struggle. I mean like most things with a child with disability, to actually get to the point baseline almost, where other parents are, you know, starting off from, is a struggle. So it wasn't easy because not all the Guide groups in Stirling wanted to take her.

Susan
When we did our promise. Was that a happy time or was that a sad time?

(Interspersed with Vanessa's replies).

What do you think?

Susan
Is that what they had to say? Was it? Can't remember the promise can you?

(Interspersed with Vanessa's replies)

Susan
No.

You're right, that was a really happy time wasn't it? What a nice smile.

Susan
… best times, wasn't it, it was a fantastic time, I'm so proud that day. And then this is one we did as a trip. Remember we went on the big bus and we went to Alloa.

(Interspersed with Vanessa's replies)

And that's like where we went. Was that a good time?

We didn't go on a plane. We went on a big bus.

Susan
Listen, we went on there.

Woman
Bus.

(Interspersed with Vanessa's replies).

Not to Isle of Wight anyway.

What do you think? That's where we did our promise wasn't it?

Lorraine
I think we're on a plane now.

Susan
Yeh.

(Interspersed with Vanessa's replies)

We're going to put it on the board.

And then this could be your last one I think.

Oh this way. Come on dancer. Is that what they do at the airport? Tell the planes what way to go?

Can maybe do some dancing in a minute, look, cos you do dancing like that don't you?

Is that for him?

Susan
There are issues, there are difficulties. Attitudes are a big barrier to inclusion where people's opinion of what inclusion actually involves can be quite different. An example being a club where young people have been told, or parents have been told that the young people are more than welcome to attend the club but only if the parents go with them, which means it's not really very inclusive. You know, the kids might as well be at home with their family.

Lorraine
Her opportunity at Guides and within that group is her opportunity for social interaction. She has that sense of belonging because she's got her uniform on, she knows the girls now, she goes up to, they know her, they've learnt a bit of Makaton, she's part of that group. You know, that's really important for her. You know, she's part of a group at school, she's part of a group at Guides and she's learning so much just from being within that group that I think it's really, really important.

Woman
I think Scott sees it as a social opportunity to be at Cubs. He has a young sibling and they do access a few sports groups together, that allows him to have his time away from home. It's his own time to spend with friends.

Peter Allan – Cub Scouts Leader
It's probably about a year now since Scott joined the Cubs. About half my kids in Cubs are at the same school as him. In the last year he has developed very well, the integration with the other kids has never been a problem, it's just got stronger though. I think it's confidence in the outdoor activities is much greater. I think the other children around him and myself and the other leaders, who have little or no experience of autism, we feel more confident.

Gail
And Scott really loves going to Cubs. There's a difference in Cubs and school. Loves Cubs, loves going, runs up, puts his uniform on, loves, don't know what he gets out of it, don't know, cos I've seen him there and he doesn't like the noise and stuff but he wants to be there. He likes being there with the other children. School: he goes to school but he has to work at school and he's challenged, which kids don't like.

Where's the camping one? Scott. Point to it.

Woman
Show us it. Can you find it?

Scott
This was my one and only, the croc badge

Woman
I don't know what that was before

Woman
Oh that's the one you did at camp yes, you did that, that's a scientist's one.

Scott
Scientist.

Woman
Yeh.

Scott
And that was from croc, a croc, the croc badge. I tried to ride on ??. She said, a loud no sound

Woman
Ah ha.

Scott
That's screaming boy. What was his name?

Gail
It was one of the boys at Cubs was screaming a few weeks ago and it really annoyed Scott.

Scott
Yes.

Peter Allan
In this little lad's case in particular, he doesn't like a lot of noise and children between the ages of 8 and 12 like to scream. We can't avoid that, it's very loud building. If I can get some more money we want to put some sound panelling on one wall to try and bring it down. That's a physical barrier. Attitudes – we've had no problems.

Susan
Something I think has been quite important when I'm working with a new organisation or just introducing a young person to an organisation has been a sort of 'about me' booklet. Throughout the booklet I make sure I mention things like what their likes are, their dislikes, how you can help support them within the organisation. Things to be aware of, moods, behaviours and it's all there, which kind of takes away from the diagnosis they have and makes them remember that there's a person amongst that and that's the first and foremost priority.

Peter
We want Scott to be able to walk to school with the rest of the children. We want him to be able to join in the activities with the rest of the children. We want him to go to activities with the rest of the Cubs and Scouts and do other things, so he's accepted as part of our community.