

Awareness raising training - a positive outcome.

A staff development element of the local authority's Youth Learning Service for its entire staff included 'awareness raising training' about Gypsy/Travellers and their culture. This was provided by the Gypsy/Traveller Community Development Project through the Family Support worker. Following this, youth workers from Larkhall approached her about their lack of success in reaching local Gypsy/Traveller young people. She agreed to conduct outreach work with the young people and their families living at local sites. There were initial discussions between all concerned to find out if anybody would be interested and if so what they would like to learn and "Gypsy/Travellers were involved at all times". They were persuaded by the idea of a place with access computers that gave "time off the site".

The first step was the establishment of a Saturday morning club for primary to secondary aged Gypsy/Traveller young people run by a youth worker and the Gypsy/Traveller support worker. This was funded partly through the Scottish Executive's Changing Children's Services Fund. The local authority match funded the project from its Youth Learning Services budget, which funded the provision of a mix of educational and recreational activities.

The programme of events negotiated with the young people is diverse; from drama and music tuition to arts and crafts as well as trips out from the centre itself.

The project proved to be very popular with the young people who attended the Saturday morning Gypsy/Traveller group. It started slowly, with a regular group of eight to ten boys and girls from ten to fifteen years of age. Within six months this group had grown in numbers to between twenty and fifty on a regular basis. The actual numbers attending sometimes fluctuate from these numbers to a hand full, which is due to Gypsy/Traveller families' nomadic culture.

Inclusion through collaboration - good practice in action

Gypsy/Traveller users and providers of this service were very satisfied with the local authority's initial attempt to meet the learning needs of Gypsy/Traveller pupils through co-operative working with Gypsy/Travellers, the Gypsy/Traveller Community Development Project and the local high school.

The Universal Connections manager considered that, "The main success of this group has been the partnership working with Universal Connections staff and the Family Support worker from the Gypsy/Traveller Community Development Project. The building of trust has been of the most importance in this venture." The Family Support worker is a pivotal member of the project, from its initial organisation and in its on-going development.

Phase 2 of the project's development was achieved through a second submission to the same funding source, to increase pupils access to learning activities during the school week.

Responsive to Gypsy/Traveller pupils' learning needs

The Headteacher of Larkhall Academy was then approached with the request that the school provided a teacher with appropriate professional skills and personal interest in supporting the Gypsy/Traveller secondary-aged pupils at Universal Connections.

A drama teacher from Larkhall Academy was duly timetabled to offer learning support in basic literacy, numeracy and in computer skills at the project. The curriculum was negotiated between the young people and the teacher, a process in which good relationships were established as the basis for working together.

Computers were provided to support the learning and teaching arrangements at Universal Connections. Gypsy/Traveller pupils were able to learn ICT skills and become familiar with linking to the Internet. Their access to email through individual hotmail accounts was set up and developed by computer support staff, which helped pupils overcome some initial problems. Some of the pupils were not familiar with using the keyboards and finding their way around the screens. Technical problems sometimes interrupted their email and Internet connections.

At the beginning of the project, staff and learners at the project did not have access to the same online education as their mainstream peers. With the delivery of pcs compatible with those provided for South Lanarkshire schools this situation will soon be a thing of the past and will open up improved learning opportunities.



Young Travellers' views of the Project

Most of the young people had attended primary school. Some had attended other secondary schools, but preferred learning at the project. Some described how they felt at high school, where other pupils "... think we are going to take things away and that they have got a right to bully us."

Another Traveller girl, who had had positive experiences at school said, "At my old school, everybody knows me. It was all right at my old school. I know a lot of people and some of them are bad and some of them are good. Some I get along with and some I don't. They all know me. Some people stick up for me. I am not frightened. If someone called me names I'd tell them to stop it."

Traveller boys' experience of schools, however, was generally less positive and largely explained in terms racist incidents, for example, one said, "I went to some primary school and I went to the academy. I went to first year and second year, but I only went about a week into third year and then I left."

The young Travellers were very positive about the educational opportunities offered by the project, for example, a second Traveller girl said of the project, "This counts as school."

Although the young people all enjoyed attending and learning at the project, and were happy with the quality of teaching and learning available to them, some expressed a wish for a broader range of topics, for example, modern languages. "At the academy or the high school you get more learning. Because we have only got one teacher and a short amount of time, we can only learn a couple of things."

The teacher working with them was also concerned about the 'part time' aspect of this "excellent provision", which in an ideal world could be offered for other pupils who experience difficulties in coping with a school environment.



Negotiating a Curriculum

Effective Outcomes - A Way Forward

The project has been very successful in engaging these young people in a range of valuable educational activities, which has expanded the young people's access to a broader curriculum.

A second teacher, whose professional background is as an art teacher, says of her work with these Gypsy/Traveller young people, "it is a fantastic opportunity to be given as a teacher ... because education doesn't have to be in a classroom ... as pupils learn and thrive in a creative and relaxed environment ... it is a great experience for a teacher." The young people are described as well mannered and respectful of their teacher and each other.

A 'learning for life' approach to the curriculum has included being taught a range of life skills. For example, a visit to the People's Palace in nearby Glasgow, was part of an art and history module, in which the young people explored the history of travelling, by comparing their own history with other religious and racial groupings and its place in the local environment. They have also enjoyed a six week web design course. The young people have produced an illustrated book, called Children's Short Stories and a video is currently being produced about Gypsy/Traveller life.

More structured approaches to the curriculum, for example, the organisation and planning for an English lesson, taught in one hour per week, is a considerable task. The learning needs of the young people might require preparation of 5 different levels of materials. Teachers from the High School's English and Maths departments are supportive of the project in providing structured materials.

Larkhall Academy's Headteacher supported these approaches by visiting the project, spending time with the teacher and the young people and talking with them about their experiences at school and the broader curriculum it offered.

Despite some negative experiences at the school in the past, the young people were helped to see school in a more positive light, which encouraged them to visit the school to experience classes in home economics, science and art. Some young people enjoyed their experiences enough to make return visits to the school. While some of the young people would thrive educationally in school, with access to a broader curriculum, young people were generally not confident about learning in the context of a large school population.

Local Authority Promotion of Equality of Opportunity

South Lanarkshire Council and its Unison branch have recognised the work of staff involved in The Travelling Children's Project. Managerial and teaching staff were joint winners of an Award for Excellence in Promoting Equality of Opportunity. South Lanarkshire Council are again actively seeking further funding to extend the project. One idea is for the council to link up with the Trades Council through a local award scheme specifically focused towards minority groups to see if the authority can further strengthen the strides it has already made in responding to the inclusion agenda set by parliament for Scotland.



Acknowledging Inclusion

The effectiveness of a working together approach (of education, youth working and user participation) is evident in the Project manager's participation in the weekday classes, who "sits in on the lessons" with the young people, and the teacher's involvement in the Saturday morning group. The sustained success of the project, perhaps, lies in the commitment and enthusiasm of the Family Support workers and the positive engagement in its activities by the staff at Universal Connections.

The *cost-effectiveness* of this project is evident in the impact it has had on the attitudes of the young people towards learning and the local secondary school. For a comparatively small input of staff and resources, the project has achieved a significant improvement in the willingness of some of the young people to engage in structured learning activities and to regard the secondary school as a place to be visited and used without an overwhelming fear of bullying and discrimination.