

Year 1 evaluation - summary

The aim of the independent evaluation is to look at how the wellbeing of the disabled young people taking part in the ten projects has been enhanced as a result of their involvement. The two main questions to be answered by this evaluation are:

1. How has the Fun and Friendship Programme contributed to a change in the wellbeing of the young people who are participating in the ten projects?
2. What factors have had the most positive/negative effects on improving the quality of social experiences for the young disabled people?

For the purposes of this evaluation, wellbeing is defined against the main programme outcomes:

1. Having fun and a good time
2. Developing confidence and self-esteem
3. Making and meeting friends
4. Supporting independence

This summary covers the first year of the programme (from April 2010 to April 2011).

Approach

The approach involved:

- An annual survey with a sample of young people exploring their experiences and outcomes (sample of 12 from each project)
- An annual survey with parents/carers exploring their experiences and observations relating to outcomes for their young person
- Semi-structured interview into the barriers and supporting factors with same sample of young people
- Follow-up qualitative research into 'independence' conducted by projects
- A desk review of projects' six-monthly and yearly reports

Supporting socialising and friendship

Young people were asked about a range of factors such as transport, school, family and self esteem, which might impact on their ability to socialise and see friends.

Factors were reported by young people to act as both barriers and supports to socialising. This was true for external factors such as transport, as well as internal

factors such as how a young person felt about themselves. Whether a factor was experienced as a barrier or supporting factor, or both, depended on the circumstances and perception of the individual. For example, transport was reported as helping someone see their friends if the young person could get lifts from their parent/carers. However, transport could act as a barrier to socialising if public transport was inaccessible, the young person did not feel confident to use it or if they could not get a lift from parents/carers. Barriers such as transport were experienced as particularly acute by some young people with less access to resources such as money, or, by those living in remote geographical locations.

How young people and their families/carers navigate barriers and their levels of resilience to cope with set backs could play an important role in the extent to which young disabled people can enjoy fun and friendship.

The importance of friendship

Friendship was reported as a crucially important factor by young disabled people, pointing to the central role friends and friendships play in young people's wellbeing. Many young people taking part in the evaluation said how much they valued and loved their friends. Sometimes young disabled people felt it was important to spend time with other young disabled people who had similar experiences.

A number of young people saw a positive correlation between visiting places such as clubs or leisure facilities, taking part in activities and developing friendships. The central role of visiting places, meeting other young people and having fun underlies the critical role the Fun and Friendship programme can play in supporting friendships.

However, poor access to schools and leisure facilities was reported as a particular barrier by physically disabled young people. In these cases, poor access acted as a barrier to seeing friends and socialising independently and led to some young physically disabled people feeling socially isolated.

Self esteem and attitudes of other people

How young disabled people felt about themselves played a central role in acting as a support or barrier to friendships. Some young people said they felt confident in themselves and enjoyed life which helped them socialise and make friends. However, a number of young people said they felt stigmatised or isolated by their peer group because of their disability. Experiences of bullying were standard across all impairment groups. This, unsurprisingly, impacted negatively on how young disabled people felt about themselves and their lives.

How projects are tackling barriers

Projects are already tackling a number of the barriers their young people highlighted. This has included: providing transport to those that are rurally isolated or cannot afford it; training leisure providers to enable disabled young people to better access local leisure provision; working with parents to help build confidence and/or raise their awareness in the importance of fun and friendship for their teenager; and building the confidence and self esteem of the young people they work with.



Findings on wellbeing

Overall scorings were positive across the four wellbeing areas: Fun and friendship, Confidence and self esteem, Making friends and Supporting Independence. The majority of young people said they had both made new friends and spent more time with friends. For some, there were reports in growing confidence and self esteem and in places this was echoed by parents:

“He’s like a butterfly opening his wings - he’ll be flying soon”. Parent

There are distinctive elements to the Fun and Friendship projects such as supporting young people’s voice, decision making and developing skills which are reported as particularly helpful in building young people’s confidence and self-esteem.

The concept of independence was understood differently by young people and included factors such as doing things with friends, spending time away from family and having choice. Projects undertook their own research into independence and this showed that many young people have advanced in their own journey in relation to independence. Examples included the young person who has self-travelled to the project for the first time; the boy who states that he is able to attend a club on his own without his buddy now and has had a friend over to his house for the first time; to the young person who can use a manual chair independently; and changes in expression and behaviour between Day 1 and Day 5 of a Rock School where one young person was nervous and withdrawn on Day 1 and full of gusto taking part in a concert on Day 5.

The need to develop self-confidence and support self-esteem were highlighted as important on the journey to independence. Music and art activities have clearly played a part in helping interaction between young people as well as the intrinsic fun of doing them and learning new skills, such as swimming, were described as helping develop confidence. Another project highlighted the importance of learning life skills, such as cooking, as being important for the future as well as interactive and fun in the present.

Reflections for the evaluation in Years 2 & 3

The evaluation underlines the critical importance of fun and friendship in contributing to the wellbeing of young disabled teenagers. Findings from the first year are largely positive and suggest a range of benefits gained from taking part in the projects for many of the young people.

The evaluation highlights the need for sustainable practices to be built during the lifetime of the programme so that positive outcomes can be achieved outside of the provision of activities and beyond the lifetime of the programme.

The evaluation also highlights the role that attitudes play in acting as barriers or supports to young disabled people socialising and making friends. Attitudes that are held by other young people, adults and the young people themselves, can shape opportunities and experiences of fun and friendship.

We look forward to working with projects and young people in Years 2 & 3 to identify how involvement in the Fun and Friendship programme contributes to the wellbeing of young disabled people.

