



National Youth Agency

read

the reading agency

Out of the box

Executive Summary

What is Out of the Box?

Out of the Box is a project supporting developmental opportunities for reading for young people aged 14 to 19 who are disaffected or disengaged from formal education. It does this by encouraging young people in youth work settings to read more widely and more frequently and by supporting stronger library-youth work partnerships. The National Youth Agency and the Reading Agency worked with local authorities around the country on the project, funded by the (then) Department for Children, Schools and Families. Some 336 young people across 18 projects in five regions of England participated in this phase of Out of the Box between April 2009 and March 2010.

What were the main findings?

Feedback from the projects makes it clear that their participation resulted in:

- more young people reading more often and more widely
- increased library membership
- an increase in books issued to young project participants
- an increase in young people's use of libraries and facilities
- a range of recorded and accredited outcomes (eg ASDAN, v)
- a number of young people sharing reading outside the project.



Getting it right for young people

Key findings on the five Out of the Box objectives were:

1 *Supporting young people to read more widely and more often*

Involvement in the project did change attitudes and behaviour. "I am now a member of the library and feel confident reading with my children." "Now I've read the Twilight books I see how much fun reading can be." "All the young people participating in the project have shown much more of an interest in reading than at the start when they were reluctant to read and didn't feel confident about their ability."

2 *Enabling and encouraging young people's personal and social development through informal education*

Conversations with young people have explored topical issues and enabled exploration of feelings and personal issues. "This means of expression allowed some to show feelings about personal issues they would probably not have revealed in normal conversations." "Young people's social development has greatly improved."

3 *Raising young people's awareness of the facilities and opportunities that libraries have to offer*

"Involvement has enabled young people to develop new perspectives about libraries and the opportunities they offer." "Through the visit of the mobile library the young people are now aware of the different types of activities and facilities available to them at their local library."

4 *Developing effective partnership working between youth workers and librarians*

This relationship has been developing at a number of different levels. "The library staff continue to visit the youth centre at least once a month. They have built good working relationships with the young people at the centre." "Before the project the youth service had very little contact with the library. This was the first time where we actually worked together." "We are already looking at other initiatives we can work on together."



5 *Increasing understanding of what works for whom in what circumstances in developing effective models of delivery*

Four key features of what works have been identified – keeping the work practical, starting where young people are, linking reading to other activities and working in informal ways. "The more practical things we did the more we got from the group." "We now know it is best to start where the young person wants to and then once they become confident, introduce new ideas or concepts." "The learning style that worked best with young people was mainly based around discussion."

Conclusions

Out of the Box concluded there are three critical conditions for success in what works.

Firstly, there needs to be **effective partnership**. Experience showed that projects failing to establish such a partnership struggled to get started or sustain themselves.

Conversely, projects with an effective youth worker-librarian partnership in which both sides are enthusiastic about reading and committed to the project flourished.

“The partnership working has been excellent. Staff from the library have been friendly and enthusiastic and we hope to continue the partnership in future. I have found the library staff to be very professional.”

Secondly, the young people need to be an already **established group**.

“Our initial aim was to work with 16 and 17-year-olds from a nearby hostel. After a first meeting it seemed a good possibility but afterwards we were unable to meet with them as a group and lost a good deal of time hoping it would come to fruition. This left us with no real time to get any sort of group together, so we had to opt for an established one.”

Thirdly, it is critical to **start where young people are** and work with them in practical and informal ways.

“Young people feel that by being asked to sit and write they are working, but if they become involved in an animation project they are happy to sit and write a storyboard.”

Barriers

Barriers included high levels of learning difficulties. “Half of the group consider they have a disability including dyslexia, learning difficulties, panic attacks, anxiety and ADHD.”

Some young people also had extremely low levels of literacy skills. “Out of the Box did not intend for us to teach them to read but that may have been more beneficial to this group.”

There were also difficulties for some participants in joining the library and the time frame of the project was deemed insufficient to determine significant changes. “The six months we have spent on the project has not been sufficient to alter the young people’s attitudes to reading. They have, however, changed some of their behaviour, for example, reading magazines more often.”



Benefits

The main benefits of the programme were seen as bringing the library to young people; building bridges across agencies and making relationships that result in a ripple effect across the community; and developing a team and approach that can be rolled out in different areas.

For young people the great success of the project was its potential to make a difference to their lives. "All my friends thought I was sad but a couple have started to read the books now and they love them as much as I do. It's given me a reason to look forward to being on my own and something to talk to my friends about."

What's next?

The Agency is organising a series of dissemination events. A full report and case studies are also available. Further information on these is available on the National Youth Agency website at www.nya.org.uk/outofthebox and on the Reading Agency website at www.readingagency.org.uk

Case study – Jade

Initially Jade, 16, refused to read to the point of crossing her arms and sitting in silence whilst others read around her. She then started to read the local newspaper after some motivating by staff, which involved picking out stories she was interested in and discussing them with her.

After meeting the youth librarian Jade started reading more, because he had tapped into her love of the Simpsons. Jade has now read every Simpsons book and is expanding her reading to include Horrible Histories, Horrible Sciences, Dr Who and celebrity magazines.

Jade's attitude to reading has changed very little if you ask her about it. She still says that reading is boring. However, at the project she reads almost every day and prepares for Out of the Box by requesting magazines the day before and talks about her reading experience when she is not at the project.

About the NYA and the Reading Agency

The National Youth Agency works in partnership with a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations to support and improve services for young people. Through our activities we want to ensure that young people have a strong voice and positive influence in our society. Find out more at www.nya.org.uk

The Reading Agency is an independent charity working to inspire more people to read more. We believe passionately in the power of reading in people's lives and want everyone to have an equal chance to become a reader. Much of our work is with public libraries and we also team up with prisons, publishers, unions, businesses, broadcasters and others. Find out more at www.readingagency.org.uk

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