

Stepping Forward, Swindon

Brief description

Stepping Forward is an alternative education provider to mainstream education for at risk and vulnerable young people aged 13 to 17. Programmes are designed to support young people with low self-esteem and, emotional and behavioural difficulties in a non-formal setting where young people can learn to express themselves in an appropriate manner.

Stepping Forward offers specialist services in education, counselling, drug misuse and sexual health. Programmes of study include AQA Unit Award Scheme, an accredited award system, life skills and all aspects of personal, social and health education (PSHE).

Funding

Funding has been secured from:

- £48,800 from Swindon Borough Council (SBC) for the project's sexual exploitation wraparound service.
- £12,800 from Swindon Borough Council for sexual health work.
- £32,000 from The South West Regional Development Agency for the project's counselling service.
- £52,000 from The Age Weighted Pupil Unit who pay a cost per student from mainstream schools.

The Department of Health also funded the project for the three-year Young People's Development Programme (YPDP) pilot project and the Youth Work for Health initiative.

Staffing

The education programme is run by an experienced team of teachers, teaching assistants, youth workers and administrators providing young people with individual support and advice. The project was originally set up 10 years ago to offer a drop-in service for young people with drug and/or alcohol misuse issues. Education was born out a very real need within the community to offer an alternative to those young people disengaged with mainstream provision.

All staff at the project have relevant training in their own areas of expertise ie sexual health & exploitation, child abuse, substance use, food & nutrition, mentoring and counselling.

The team has a wide range of experience and knowledge of working with vulnerable young people, including counselling, sexual health and drug misuse. The project provides continued professional development opportunities for staff through access to training.

Stepping Forward has excellent links with other local agencies. Alongside its own specialist workers it works with a range of health care professionals in order to deliver sessions as needed such as school nurses, dentists, drug & alcohol advisors and Connexions PAs. Staff members are also involved with a number of local strategic groups.



Nature of provision

Which groups of young people does the project work with?

Stepping Forward works with young people predominantly aged 13 to 17 who are at risk of exclusion from mainstream education for a variety of reasons. They can be referred to the project from all mainstream schools in the Swindon area and tend to come from families which live in deprived areas and different family structures including single parents, extended families, young carers and families with underlying drug/alcohol and/or mental health issues.

What are the main health approaches used and activities offered?

Stepping Forward's curriculum is underpinned by the promotion of a healthy lifestyle. The project offers opportunities to be accredited in all areas of health related issues ie Unit Award Scheme, Getting Connected, Youth Achievement Awards and through in-house incentives and rewards.

Weekly activities are planned to promote physical activity. These include gym sessions, rock climbing, ice skating, table tennis, badminton, mountain biking, kayaking and raft building. Good links with health providers, clinics and after hours services. Ongoing campaigns are actively promoted, for example, World Aids Day, National Condom Week and Mental Health Day. We actively promote a healthy lifestyle which is achievable for all.

Stepping Forward actively promotes healthy eating to all involved with the project, offering a healthy breakfast and lunch on-site.

How are young people involved in shaping the programme?

Young people are involved in the curriculum planning and general topics to be covered. There is an annual consultation in which young people discuss the following year's provision and help to shape their project within the boundaries of our funding and ethos. Young people are actively involved in housekeeping, planning and curriculum matters. We carry out participation questionnaires on a regular basis.

Weekly physical activities both indoor and outdoor are provided which are discussed and planned with the young people, which ensures there is maximum uptake. Young people work on a reward system for their work, behaviour and attitude for which they can earn raffle tickets to win gift vouchers. For exceptional work or attitude young people can earn a token which goes towards a whole group reward, normally an outing which young people plan after being given a budget.

How does the project respond to the needs of different young people particularly the most marginalised?

All staff are well prepared to deal with emotional wellbeing issues. They are able to directly advise, signpost and complete internal/external referrals as needed. There is always a professionally trained counsellor available on-site.

Several members of staff have counselling qualifications and all staff have relevant experience of mental and emotional health issues. The majority of staff are 'Getting Connected' accredited and the project has both in-house and external referral systems in place. We have excellent links with external agencies and are able to refer to specialist



organisations if needed eg U-Turn (specialist substance misuse team), GUM (Genito-Urinary) Clinic, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) etc.

Outcomes

How do young people benefit from their involvement in the project?

All young people leave Stepping Forward with at least one formal accreditation. Most leave with far more, including many AQA Unit Awards in a wide variety of subject areas both vocational and non-vocational. The vast majority of our work is recorded and goes towards formal accreditations. We pride ourselves in sharing the young people's work with others.

We hold a formal Celebration Event each year where young people are presented with their personal progress files and local funders,

parents/carers and mainstream schools are invited to celebrate with us. We have a guest speaker at these events, usually an ex user of the project. In 2007 all Year 11 leavers went onto further education, training or employment.

Weekly reports are sent to mainstream schools, parents, carers, Education Welfare Officers and social workers. These outline the programme of study and activities young people have been involved in and include a written evaluation by staff and a reflection from the young people, alongside a target for the following week. These reports ensure that all agencies working with the young people are informed and up to date. Work is well captured and leads to displays, written work, art pieces and accreditations. Work is often shared as exemplar with other agencies and at workshops/seminars.

With the national and local rise in obesity and general lack of physical

activity Stepping Forward chose to introduce a Healthy Lifestyle/Healthy Eating Initiative. This was a challenge to the Education Manager who wanted to implement healthy lunches for all young people but initially found some resistance from other staff. We have always been concerned with young people's eating habits and have offered a healthy breakfast of wholemeal toast, cereals and hot and cold drinks for the last three years.

The implementation of the lunchtime provision was developed alongside a development chef from a large worldwide corporation. Menus were developed in line with the Department for Children, School and Families' guidelines for healthy eating. The project also drew up policies which were sent to homes outlining our concerns and the added value of a healthy lifestyle and diet. We provide fresh cooled drinking water and fruit bowls at all times.

All young people and staff eat

together at lunchtime and it has become a social time for all where we can relax and chat about current issues and generally enjoy each other's company. The young people take it in turns to plan, shop online and cook with a member of staff for the week ahead choosing from the specially designed recipes. The rewards to young people are visible with raised self esteem for the cook and a more positive outlook towards healthy foods and often unknown meals/ingredients. We cook all meals using fresh ingredients, nothing frozen and no condiments at the table.

The project manager has acknowledged the success of this initiative despite having some initial reservations. She was concerned about the cost implication and the behaviour of the young people, but has acknowledged the cost effectiveness and improved behaviour over lunchtime and the afternoon sessions.

Young people are supported as appropriate through group and individual work. On arrival initial one-to-one assessments are carried out with the youth worker who looks at all four areas of healthy youth work – healthy lifestyle, healthy relationships and sex, mental and emotional wellbeing and substance misuse. An individual plan is then drawn up and the young people referred to our internal or external services if needed.



Measuring effectiveness

How is the project's work evaluated?

We have just been awarded the 'Healthy Provider Award for Swindon' following gaining our Healthy Schools status three years ago. We have a very good attendance rate with young people attending for over 85 per cent of their time; this figure takes an average with some young people having a 100 per cent attendance record since starting. We record initial and ongoing evaluation of and from young people and hold regular review meetings with school/parents/carers.

An interim evaluation showed 95 per cent of young people at Stepping Forward were at risk of school exclusion and that 100 per cent of young people achieved AQA Unit Award Certificates. We have a constant waiting list from schools wishing to refer, which shows our ongoing effectiveness in working with vulnerable young people.

What factors help the delivery of healthy youth work?

We have a very specialised and dedicated team of professionals who all strive to work with young people in the most effective ways possible. All staff are committed to Continuing Professional Development and attend courses and meetings on a regular basis.



What factors hinder this work?

As a non profit making charity we rely on the sourcing of funding and stable core funding is always an issue to us. The background of some students on the programme means we are forever striving to change the values and related health issues which have been underlying for many generations and we try to work very closely with families/carers.

Partnership/ multidisciplinary working

What other agencies do you work with on a regular basis?

We have excellent links with other agencies with representation on The Young Persons Strategic Partnership Group; the Sexual Health Targeted Prevention Group and the Harm Reduction Group. We work very closely with social services and can often become the lead professionals for the

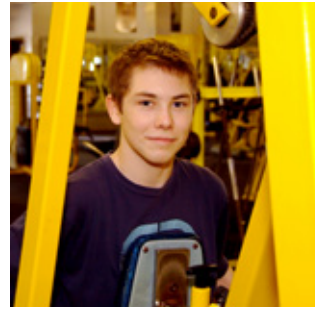


caseload. We have a dedicated child protection officer who attends all child protection meetings and reviews.

Strategic impact

Do you consider this project to be innovative in terms of healthy youth work?

As one of only three alternative providers in Swindon we consider ourselves to be at the forefront of healthy lifestyle leadership. We are the only project to be working on targeted healthy youth work and providing a totally healthy and designer lead menu. We pride ourselves in the opportunities we provide for all young people and are constantly striving to move forward. We have recently been approached by the local education authority to be commissioned for a pro-active model of reducing the number of school exclusions based on an American model of success which includes all elements of healthy youth work.



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