

## **Celebrating gains in confidence and changed behaviours**

Sometimes as tutors we can focus too heavily on the hard outcomes required to monitor learner's progress. We talk about success in terms of test results and qualifications. Often this can have the effect of reinforcing learners' prejudices that 'it's just like school' and this may deter some of the less able and confident individuals.

We were lucky enough to secure funding from the Big Lottery to engage families from some of the more disadvantaged areas in the Gosport community through our Beyond Horizons Project. This funding was to be used creatively to build confidence and strengthen family relationships.

The funding was used to organise a family activity day at a local outdoor centre and places were offered to two local schools. 25 families attended and enjoyed a very wet day out on what turned out to be the wettest Sunday of the year. Families worked together to build and sail rafts, completed team challenges on a set of high wires, climbed, abseiled and kayaked. Some of the children had been invited as they were disruptive or had trouble concentrating at school. What was fantastic to see was the way they listened to instructions, waited their turn and participated with such enthusiasm in all the activities. Their class teacher joined us for the day with her children and she was struck by how determined some of the children were and how much they wanted to achieve and succeed.

One boy who had real trouble concentrating at school was one of the most determined to have a go at every thing. Despite capsizing his kayak first thing and having no dry clothes to change into he remained cheerful and attempted everything. The next day at school the teacher reported to me that he was the best behaved he'd ever been. I spoke to his class teacher again at the end of the week and she said both he and another child who frequently misbehaved had managed a whole week without having 'time out'.

The raft building was the favourite activity for many people. Mums, dads and children worked together (often in torrential rain) to build a raft out of old oil cans and ropes. They then had to manoeuvre it to the water's edge, climb on and launch it. They all commented on how satisfying it was when it didn't sink and how proud they were of their handiwork.

Several activities were quite scary - the zip wire and Burma rope bridge over the river being especially memorable. Parents and children were really encouraging each other to conquer their fears and have a go. One dad who was separated from his 4 children but had come with them for the day said he had really enjoyed it and would try and do something similar again as he felt much closer to his children after sharing some of the experiences with them.

We ran workshops at the schools the following week and parents were encouraged to come and collect photos and make collages about the day.

Comments from families in answer to 'What is the most important thing that you will remember about your experience ?' included :

- That we work well as a family
- Not being scared of heights
- Having lots of fun as a family

- Working together as a team
- Laughing whilst being wet
- Having fun as a family
- Having fun despite the weather

In one of the schools the Head was thrilled to find that parents she had never seen before had attended. We are continuing to work with this school, building on the trust and confidence gained on the fun day out. Parents have come into school for a short healthy eating course with their children and a Christmas workshop and are about to embark on a literacy and craft based course where they will work with their children to explore and make books, building up writing skills as they do so.

The soft outcome of increased confidence for both the adults and children generated by the experience of trying and succeeding in personal challenges is an important building block, as is the new relationship many of these adults now have with their child's school. We need to value and celebrate these outcomes and look at ways of building on them. Hopefully the hard outcomes will follow in due course.

We have used this success as a model to help other schools, children's centres and organisations that we work with to develop innovative ideas for family learning. The Big Lottery Project is helping to initially recruit families through fun based activities and events and then we are able to progress parents onto LSC funded wider family learning and family literacy, language and numeracy programmes.

