

Engaging young fathers who had been involved in criminal activities

Key messages:

1. Working with a community group helped to enhance the tutor base and engage this group of learners;
2. Importance of establishing boundaries and building up trust;
3. Group discussions were key, with tutor taking a facilitator role;
4. A safe environment was vital to enabling honest and open discussion.

Nottingham City Council imported the Law & Order course from the Isle of Wight, as part of an Action Research project transferring practice between local authorities. They were delivering the programme predominantly to white working class mums and, with the FLIF funding, wanted to extend the reach to different ethnic groups, in particular looking at issues around guns, gangs and knives. They identified that, in order to reach this client group, they needed a different tutor base to the one that their usual partner, a local FE college, was able to offer. In the words of one of the partners, 'What will a middle-aged, middle-class white woman be able to teach me about guns, gangs and knives?' They therefore began working with a new partner, Take-One, a community group that offered E2E¹ and PCDL² courses and was very successful in reaching Black and Minority Ethnic groups.

Take-One offers courses above a barber shop, popular with African Caribbean men. For this programme, they targeted young, predominantly African Caribbean dads aged between 19 and 25. All the participants had been in trouble with the law at some point, and were known to organisations such as Youth Offending Teams, the Probation Service and Connexions. Most were unemployed and those who were working were in low-skilled, low-paid work. Many had drug problems (mostly cannabis) and several were involved with local gangs.

The course ran as an adult-only course in the first instance. Eight learners started and completed the course which gave them the opportunity to explore their experiences of the criminal justice system and look at how they could prevent their children getting involved in gangs and criminal activity. Speakers were invited from the Youth Offending Team, magistrates, Community Support Officers and Nottingham Homes (a local housing association). Although the original intention was to invite police officers from

¹ Entry to Employment

² Personal and Community Development Learning

the drug squad, it was agreed that this might be too confrontational and that the Community Support Officers who already had a relationship with the community, would be more appropriate.

The course was tailored to suit the needs and backgrounds of the learners. The learners wanted to explore their experiences and look at what they could do for their children. Tutors, therefore, took a facilitating role rather than a course delivery role, and the course was modified to emphasise group discussions. This was the most powerful aspect of the course - the learners valued being able to express their opinions and challenge each other in a safe environment. They learned to articulate their perspectives and to feel less threatened by different opinions. They also valued the opportunity to talk with representatives from criminal justice services, in a safe environment, 'on their own turf', where power relationships were more equal than the situations in which they would normally encounter these services. The line between what could and could not be discussed without consequences, was made very clear, so learners were sure about the boundaries and felt safe. Guest speakers were always brought in part way through a session, so that there was always the opportunity to remind learners of these boundaries.

Immediate progression from the course included 2 learners moving on to Skills for Life Numeracy courses and two becoming further involved with Take-One's activities such as music recording, photography, DJ-ing etc. Nottingham Family Learning Service hopes to develop aspects of the programme to include the children in future, and hopes that the other activities and resources that Take-One offer will help to engage the children and overcome some of the challenges of working with a mixed age group. They intend to further develop the partnerships that have been integral to this and the other law and order courses. They feel that this programme has 'taken the partnership to another level.'

Nottingham Family Learning

