

WORKSHOP

TEENAGE PARENTS AS PEER EDUCATORS

WORKSHOP FACILITATORS:

Kirsty O'Donnell, Senior Youth Development Worker, REACT, Scottish Marriage Care

Marion Laird, Head of Services, Scottish Marriage Care.

Contributions were also made by Jody and Belinda, young parents who are peer educators and Carol, Debbie and Trish, project workers in Falkirk, Dundee and Glasgow.

The REACT project is based in Easterhouse and Glasgow East. RESPOND run by One Parent Families Scotland is based in Falkirk and Dundee.

Marion introduced the workshop by stating that Scottish Marriage Care got together with One Parent Families, Scotland to support this project. It's based on the principle that good family relationships provide the best start in life. There was recognition that there were a number of parenting programmes but few focussed on relationship support. The significance of the mother / father – baby relationship as modelling future relationships and the impact of parental conflict adversely affecting relationships was acknowledged.

Through early intervention, the project would

- 1 Educate young people about relationships.
- 2 Work directly with young people.

The hope is that through providing a positive experience, young people might feel more confident to return to agencies in the future should they need support.

At the beginning of the workshop, delegates were invited to take a stone from a bag, think of a parent / child who they know or have worked with, who have touched them in some way, and hold the stone throughout the workshop. (At the end of the workshop delegates were told to keep the stone as a reminder of the parent / child and place it in their office or in their home eg by their kettle).

Debbie, a Youth Development worker, with RESPOND, began by undertaking a mapping exercise in Dundee identifying which agencies worked with young parents. The young parents interested in participating were trained and help deliver workshops offering one to one support and peer education training.

Jody, one of the young parents involved, said that she had experienced workers saying they would offer support, in the past, but nothing materialised. The difference with Debbie and the project was that Debbie demonstrated she was dependable by following up her words with action and trust developed as a result.

Jody and other young parents produced a drama writing their own storyline and performing it. Those who had seen it spoke of the powerful emotional impact it had. Jody spoke about how participation in the project increased her self confidence. (Testament to this was Jody and Belinda's ability to speak so well during the workshop.)

Through participation in the project Jody can talk to other mums and has also learned how to answer young people's questions and the importance of confidentiality and boundaries. In a personal capacity, she thinks she has become a better parent to her son and she has also searched for and been reunited with her father as a result of the personal work she's done with the project.

In Dundee there are now six trained parents with new parents becoming involved. They are looking forward to working with young people in schools and discovering new ways of helping young people to open up in talking about feelings and relationships.

Carol, project worker, and Belinda, young parent, spoke about their work in Falkirk. Belinda heard about the project when she was living in homeless accommodation with her child. Belinda wanted to build up her CV and go to college but her personal circumstances, living in a hotel were a barrier to this. Careers Scotland let Belinda know about the project and she attended the workshop where she learned about training, data protection and confidentiality.

Through her training as a peer educator, Belinda has learned how to deal with inappropriate questions from her peer group eg who is her child's father. Her training on boundaries has helped with this. She has also recognised how it was difficult for her to talk to people the same age as her at school – she is much more able to do this now. Belinda spoke of how much she has developed personally – she would never have been able to speak publically in the past. Her CV is more impressive and she plans to go on an ACCESS course and to college.

Trish is a REACT project worker and relationship counsellor in Easterhouse, Glasgow. Trish explained how young people becoming more aware of emotions and feelings can provide them with different tools so that they are more prepared to handle different situations.

Two demonstrations of the projects work were helpfully presented. Kirsty, with Jody's assistance showed how a family tree visually represented by photographs can serve as a tool in talking about relationships, identifying patterns within relationships and speaking about painful issues eg the death of a relative the young person has been close to.

Trish and Debbie role played a young person and counselling support worker. A selection of pebbles on a plate were presented to the young person who selected pebbles to represent family members. The texture and position of pebbles symbolised relationships and the counsellor worked sensitively in helping the young person talk about tensions, supports, isolation, likeness and closeness. In the role play a breakthrough was acted out when the counsellor drew on the young person's historic experience and its resonance with current family relationships.

During questions from delegates Carol outlined the six week training programme which covers

- 1 Working together
- 2 Confidence and assertiveness
- 3 Relationships – bullying
- 4 Self image
- 5 Emotions
- 6 Reflection – what it's like being a young parent

One to one counselling can run alongside group work if that is needed. Debbie commented that whilst each session has a structure this can change depending on the needs of the group.

In Glasgow Kirsty recruited four young people for peer education training. They participated in a 12 week training programme – six weeks personal development and six weeks group work. The young people wrote their own letters, designed posters, selected the sessions and decided on the activities for the group.

Carol commented that young people don't use diaries like workers.

Using text, e-mail, telephone calls and letters were positive ways of workers keeping in touch which young parents valued.

Young parents work has been predominantly with young mothers but the projects have worked with young dads as part of a couple. Whilst the target group is young parents the actual work of the projects is with young people. As Jody said "you're a young parent but you're treated as a young person. When you go to the group you get you get your name back for a couple of hours".

Delegates showed their appreciation of an interesting, informative and well presented workshop.