

TITLE:

The Yard Project

DATE:

January 2009



ORGANISATION PROFILE

Community Interest Company

2 full time employees

3 part time workers

20+ volunteers

SUMMARY

A trio of people involved in youth work in Suffolk created a practical project for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The success rate for young people leaving The Yard project and going on to employment or other training is very high and the project has also improved local community cohesion.

EAUC COMMENT

This case study provides an excellent example of sustainability and community engagement. By providing a service to the local people, the Yard Project educates young people whilst also bringing together the community they work in.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The local community.

THE PROBLEM

Suffolk has the highest youth unemployment rate in the East of England and Lowestoft has the greatest number of Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) young people in Suffolk. There are very few job opportunities in the area and most young people who do not go on to higher education enter the revolving door of training programmes that do not lead to employment.

In addition, the statistics showed that many young people enter training schemes and college only to drop out fairly quickly. This “revolving door” was the catalyst for the Yard Project to be set up.

THE APPROACH

Three people already involved in youth work – Geoff Young, Jason Squires and Peter Grubb – came up with the idea of establishing a practical project where young people could experience real work and have a sense of pride in their contribution, whilst also engaging and benefitting the local community.

It was agreed that the best approach was to give young people the opportunity to address the barriers to getting a job by giving them real experience of the demands, responsibilities and expectations of having and keeping a job. The Yard was conceived as a project which would benefit young people as well as leave a positive legacy for the local people.

With support from Action for Children, a charity focusing on children, (formerly NCH), Geoff, Jason and Peter applied for a grant to purchase a run-down building in Lowestoft that young people could renovate. A short term capital grant from Lowestoft Together, a local community development initiative, made the purchase possible. More capital funding was accessed both locally and nationally which allowed the project to employ a full-time building supervisor and a trainees manager to take responsibility for the young people’s training and development. Trainees work towards various awards and qualifications in subjects such as bricklaying, Health and Safety, grasscutting and scaffolding.

Young people were recruited through Connexions, the government advice service for 13 to 19 years olds which is responsible for identifying and supporting young people who are NEET, and by word of mouth.

OUR GOALS

- To come up with a new way of helping young people NEET so they develop real skills which do help them go into work or training
- For every young person entering the project to move into work or full time vocational training
- To establish the Yard as a community resource providing access to social and learning opportunities for all of the residents of Harbour ward

OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS

Obstacle

- Securing revenue funding so the project can continue – a problem because all of the statutory funding, from central government, is available only to training agencies which offer the traditional curriculum of numeracy, literacy and skills qualifications.
- Keeping the young people interested and involved in the project, when they would naturally want to give up because they were not used to sustaining physical work and usually had a limited attention span.
- The size and scope of the building project
- Engaging the community in the project

Solution

- The team at the Yard are involved in a long term campaign to educate the local Strategic Partnerships and the Learning and Skills Council of the need for more recognition of innovative successful methods of achieving their targets
- There will be income from user groups and projects which will use the building when it is complete, but the team knows it will also have to re-invent the project
- Constant reinventing of tasks to keep the young people interested
- Celebration of every achievement, however small – as an example, the first goal given to each young person is to arrive on time and fit for work. They have four weeks to achieve this
- Seek the support of people who can help. The project has received free or discounted help from builders, planners and architects.
- Employ a building work supervisor to ensure all work is completed to a good standard
- Encourage them to get involved. The Yard Project created a complementary initiative called 'Pride in our Road'. This project focused on the front gardens of the terraced houses in the local roads in the area around The Yard which is the second most deprived ward in Suffolk.
- As part of The Yard project, young people cleaned up the gardens and encouraged and supported the residents to plant colourful plants to brighten up the road. This got the community talking to one another and sharing ideas and effort.
- Design the finished building as a community resource so they will benefit from it in the long-term has helped them see the positive benefits of the project

PERFORMANCE AND RESULTS

The building is expected to be completed in January 2009. 54 young people have been involved with the project. Of these:

- 23 have gone into employment
- 2 have set up their own business ventures
- 16 have gone on to full time vocational course
- 5 have left with no destination
- 2 have gone to prison
- 1 left through illness
- 1 left to be a full time parent
- 4 are currently with the project

LESSONS LEARNT

This unique approach to engaging young people and the community really works, as demonstrated by the results. The combination of practical experience, good support and never-ending encouragement attracts young people who would otherwise not be interested and, most importantly, equips them with the skills they need to start to contribute to society.

Young people are individuals and need treating – and training – as such. A fixed curriculum or ‘one size fits all’ approach does not achieve the results the Yard project has demonstrated.

The trainees get as much satisfaction from digging a good trench as they do from getting a grade C GCSE, and for them the personal qualities they demonstrate in completing the trench will probably help them move quicker into work than the qualification.

The key to maintaining this success is in securing revenue funding to keep the project open after the initial capital funding has run out. This is something The Yard project is still working on.

Could you set up a similar project? The Yard team believe the key is in the process. It doesn't have to be based around building, it could be an environmental community task. The outcomes take care of themselves.

Partnerships are helpful and engaging the local community is crucial. However, the Yard also valued their independence. This gave them the opportunity to shape and respond to the changing needs of the young people and the project without having the constraints of others' demands.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Yard does not currently have a website but the team are happy to give more information or provide advice on working with the NEET group.

Contact Geoff Young on **07882 710930** or Peter Grubb on **07908 007219**.



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