

National Coalition

NCBI

Building Institute

London

**Building
Community
Cohesion**

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MOY Young People Residential Identity and Difference Leadership Development 16-19 August 2010 - YHA Cheshunt, Hertfordshire

1. Introduction

NCBI London and Ministry of Youth took a group of 8 young males and 8 young females on a 3 day residential workshop.

Residential Workshop Aims

The workshop aimed to achieve a number of desirable outcomes for the young people:

1. the aim was to increase their awareness of leadership qualities;
2. identifying and enhance their own leadership skills;
3. become more aware of their responsibilities towards others;
4. assisting them to identify and develop their skills towards thinking and behaving differently in themselves and towards others

In addition the aim was:

1. to equip young people with conflict resolution skills to combat aggressive and extreme behaviours;
2. for young people having control of their lives in extreme circumstances;
3. young people to develop stronger peer relationships;
4. young people being more confident, feeling safer on the streets and encouraging others to speak out against extremist behaviour.

As part of the approach we sought to:

- increase personal effectiveness;
- teach fresh ways of thinking;
- increase skills as bridge builders;
- assist to see humanness and
- be aware of how situations can hurt themselves and others

In addition to NCBI leadership development learning

the young people did several other activities. These include canoeing, caving, rock climbing. In the evening there were games, dancing swimming and lots of social discussions with both youth leaders and peers. This report is a brief reflection from the workshop activities.



2. The Activities

1. Ups/ Downs

This activity allowed the young people to explore and notice the complexity of identities and experiences we all hold. With that knowledge they were able to assess how the impact of their identity contributed to them being in relationship to each other. This included the positive and negative aspects of relationships. Some saw it as a celebration of self and a real connection to others.

This activity helped the young people to arrive and relax into the residential. There were lots of laughter as they explored identities significant to each of them.

2. First Thoughts

This exercise helped the young people explore stereotypes and projections towards others and how these get played out in our everyday lives. Our stereotyping are assumptions based on projections and has the potential of leading to conflicts. Some also identified stereotyping and name calling as a defence mechanism, a way of managing their own inadequacy or lack of self worth.

Doing this exercise proved a significant success as the young people saw clearly the harmful effects of first thoughts.

“it makes me feel better to call boys names.”

3. Behaviours contract

As a result of first thoughts we got to explore new ways of working and being in relationship to each other. We established a new behaviours contract to support the young people throughout the residential. The young people also saw the positive benefit of having the behaviour contract as a morale code and using it in other aspects of their lives, such as team meetings and on the streets of Lewisham. The contract identified:

1. Get involved
2. Respect and politeness
3. Listen to people talking
4. No abusive language
5. Get enough sleep
6. We will be on time for all sessions

4. Human knot


The human knot exercise taught the young people about community cohesion building as an integral part of integration and relationship building. As a fun activity the human knot demonstrates interrelationship in a very practical, engaging way. Its success was wholly based on applying interdependancy skills of listening, patience and following instructions from others. The principles being taught was successfully achieved.

“we needed everyone’s co-operation to make it work”

5. Caucus groups

This activity allowed the young people to gather according to identity groups and share with others what they love about that identity. They found this to be a fun exercise, empowering and enabling them to boast about themselves, something that they don't get to experience enough. It also enabled them to take a space for themselves without being criticised or challenged.

As can be seen below, the young people enjoyed working together in the seven identity groups they chose. This activity was successful in its attempt to build self confidence, self esteem and pride for themselves.

Young men Lots of opportunity, driving, relationship, entrepreneurial/apprenticeship, working and making money, responsibility/irresponsibility, being successful, history makers, companionship, love	Mixed race Hair, skin, food, cultures, eye colour, eye lashes, mixed heritage, different religions, holiday over the world with your family, most mixed race boys are sexy, all different skin tones, traditional clothes, easy straighten, soft hair, mixed race president.
Muslims Discipline, better understanding of self, diversity, Qur'an, women are loved.	Turkish Turkish music, food, boys, clothes, the country, the hot weather –sunny, Turkish sweets
Black people Food, dancing, clothes, success, Barack Obama – 1 st black president, your skin colour, once you go black you never going back	Teenagers Young, energetic, different, different backgrounds, can relate to each other, lots of choices, modern technology, music, different type of clothes, more likely to be wealthy
Canadians Multicultural, bilingual, maple syrup, adventurous, nature and environment, acceptance and freedom, hockey, politeness, music, weather, sense of humour, diversity, friendly, sense of community, pride, space, <i>tuques</i> , and we don't like being called Americans.	

*“we’re all one, like a snowflake.” “the agenda is about us”
“interactive, joyful, learnt about each other”*

6. Emotions

This exercise helped the young people to describe and practise getting in touch with emotions. A number of young people are not given the opportunity of self expression so it was good they could identify different type of emotions and play with them in a very conscious way. The different emotions they identified – fear, love, sadness, confusion, upset, happiness, envy, jealousy, anger, courage and bravery.

Many young people are cut off from expressing and discussing different types of emotions. Different expressions may happen for them but without the opportunity for a conversation about emotions, what caused them and how to manage them, the emotions can just be left in a place of confusion. This exercise helped them to name emotions and to discuss situations when they are likely to happen. We also got an opportunity to discuss cause and effects from the emotions. It helped the young people learn that we all have different types of emotions, that they are a normal part of who we are and there is a need for us to understand and control them.

“its easier to do anger than happiness”

7. Listening

This exercise provided an opportunity for the young people to practise effective listening. As a skill most found it difficult to do well. Indeed some struggled and could not do it at all. Some found the compulsion to talk overwhelming and the idea of being still and attentive almost impossible to do. In the dialogue that followed some spoke about listening in this

way was not natural for them to do. Their usual way of being was open and ongoing banter with cross talking over each other. Although they recognised it was not effective listening they considered that style showed their mutual friendship.

A key part of the residential is building confidence and this means ensuring the young people operated outside of embarrassment. Embarrassment has the tendency to slow down individual growth. We therefore decided that because the young people found this exercise hard to do, we reduced the time allocated and gave them an earlier/longer break-time.



8. Speak outs

Speak out are stories of personal experiences of mistreatment. This exercise gave the young people an opportunity to share some of their stored up hurt and pain with others who were willing to listen and identify with their experiences. Some of the stories shared were painful to hear but it enabled the young people to begin a recovery process to enable them to move on with their lives. The young people recognised they were not alone, that there were lots of same or similar experiences in their midst. They identified this as a source of strength. They found the exercise very useful and helpful for their well-being. As a result of doing speak outs most of the young people recognised the benefit of listening as a personal benefit to themselves. In the overall feedback from the residential, the speak outs was one of the most referenced by the young people as a good experience.

“good hearing other people stories and being listened to”

9. Changing attitudes

This exercise teaches the young people skill building. How to constructively deal with narrow-mindedness or conflict when we hear or see it and how to work with other people to change their attitude or behaviours. Key to this exercise is not making the situation worse or compromising relationships. The young people grasped the concept and reasons for working on changing attitudes but needed lots more time to practise these new skills. Some could not see this strategy as an effective one when facing serious anger. They recognised their own fear getting in the way and possibly stopping the process from happening well. We encouraged them to consider this as one way to deal with a situation and to see it as contributing towards stopping an incident from getting worse. Key factors are listening and taking your own ‘ouch’ out of the equation.

*“she cusses him and he says sorry!”
“I liked when you changed the subject.”*

10. Controversial issue

This activity is a series of interactive exercises that bring together listening skills, effective questioning and patience all designed to equip young people to constructively deal with prejudice and conflict, thereby avoiding, minimise or nullify conflict. A due process with

one person speaking for the issue and another speaking against it, not from a place of contradiction but from empathy. The aim was to demonstrate to young people that in any given situation we always have so much more in common than we have against. We wanted them to notice that we so often focus on the small differences and that can cause a situation, disagreement or argument to appear worse than it actually is. We showed them how to ultimately work towards creating a win/win for all. Most young people understood the process and demonstrated clear understanding throughout.

One of the challenges we experienced from time to time amongst the young people was huge academic disparity and at times, the level of concentration proving difficult for some. During this exercise some were challenged by one or both of these factors. This meant some got confused and found the process too long for their attention span. However, the exercise did continue to a very useful outcome.

The question the young people ultimately chose to explore was - "Should New Cross Gate get more youth facilities"? One had to speak 'for' and another 'against'. As can be seen, both made reasoned arguments for their case. An ultimate step in the process would be reframing the question to have a wide circle of people committed to discussing it. Because of the attention span challenge, we decided not to go on to the reframing part of the process.

For	Against
1. Yes because without our own facilities, things got broken and we are blamed	1 Its uncomfortable for older people in the community
2. We have to leave shared facilities early	2 We will be taking over older people space
3. We don't own our space and other people complain	3 More stuff getting broken will give young people a bad reputation
4. With our own building we can accommodate more people	4 Young people have trashed facilities already and they have to be reconstructed
5. Young people off the street can enhance the community	5 Other people need funding for other community projects

*"it was different, I learnt more, there were similarities."
"I was baffled."*

3. Review of the Residential

The residential was an overall success. It enables a group of young people to get away from their usual surroundings and to look at themselves as young people. It effectively enabled them to work together as a group, supporting each other to do a series of exercises. Each activity was designed as a stand alone learning tool and yet linking and building on earlier activities.

Overall, there was good progress by the young people from some being shy on day one, to engaging on day two and gregarious with some arguments on day three. This represents encouraging growth.

Some of the young people work with a low attention threshold, perhaps exacerbated by usual bad sleep patterns and diet. There were struggles of leadership at times to manage adequate sleep and diet for the young people. The feedback from the young people are

varied in places and particularly where the Youth Leaders struggled to hold a line of reasonableness. However, this does not detract from their overall enjoyment of the residential. Some of their comments are shown below.

1. *All cultures have different aspects in the world such as foods, clothes, religion etc*
2. *I have learned that everyone makes mistakes and they don't mean to do it*
3. *Boring, it made me more tired and then there were good interesting facts that I liked*
4. *I learned that some Canadians eat seal.*
5. *We got to learn more things about people, and I had fun outside playing the game human knot, and was bored at times.*
6. *The emotions was the most enjoyable part of the day, hearing other people stories and being listened to. All the stories we did as a big group and listening as a smaller group*
7. *I enjoyed turning a negative conversation into a positive conversation*
8. *What I enjoyed was all the exercises and playing games and swimming*
9. *Enjoyed the conflict and how to deal with problems*



Two occurrences

An incident presented itself on the second day of the residential. Two of the young women (usually good friends) had fallen out over an incident that was having an impact on the whole group. We were able to use the NCBI tools we were teaching them to address and resolve the matter.

We got each to 'speak out' about the issue without interruption. We asked each to listen and playback what they had heard the other person saying; we asked each how hearing the other person had made them feel (ie what was their emotional connection to the issue).

After they had heard each other both understood the emotional connection and attachment they had for each other. The next part of the process was magical, they apologised and hugged each other, cried and made up. We were able to achieve this change process within the 15 minutes comfort break allocated to the group. The whole group was not directly part of this conflict resolution remedial work, but knew something had happened. They did notice that this had happened in a short space of time, the situation was resolved and all was now well.

Another scenario presented itself – throughout the residential workshop we encouraged the young people to take more pride in themselves, seek out and hold greater value etc. As a result, late into the second day, one young person brought us this ongoing situation because she needed help and clarity. Young people are constantly grappling with peer pressure and for her that meant not being able to ask questions in her class at school. To do so meant being laughed at by peers.

We were able to explore with her the knowledge and learning benefits derived from asking questions. We examined what it takes to be a leader amongst peers; that leadership

means taking a step on behalf of those who did not really know but were even more scared to ask. We explored that the person asking the question was actually being an advocate asking on behalf of others and that regularly asking will encourage others to do likewise; that by constantly doing so it will become the norm for others and they will all gain the positive aspects of knowledge and learning. In addition, the teacher will find the class more engaging and therefore will become more willing to impart their knowledge. She smiled and undertook to put this into action when she goes back to school.

NCBI Learning points from the MOY residential

1. NCBI to have more involvement in the choosing of the final Youth Leadership team for the programme and this to be determined and agreed prior to all booking arrangements as some we considered were not suitable for an NCBI residential.
2. Leadership team to have regular morning, mid-day and evening review meetings agreeing clear roles and responsibilities over a 24 hour period including safeguarding principles.
3. NCBI to meet the young people prior to booking the residential to discuss and agree the programme idea and core content. This includes appropriate and best fit language ensuring it matches the age and development level of participants and then shape the programme accordingly.
4. Leadership team to have clearly defined sleep arrangements for the programme and to discuss and agree food/nutrition/snacks protocols as an integral part of the programme
5. Leadership team to work with openness, honesty and integrity around the young people.
6. The work we did to establish a behaviour contract with the young people was an excellent idea. However this should have happened as a first activity rather than link it to mid morning.
7. The intellectual and focus span for the whole group was vast. Some of the young people had poor attention, some was permanently tired and some did not want to learn. Perhaps some came on the residential for the fun aspect rather than the learning. We saw first hand some of the challenges the education system could experience on a day to day basis.

4 Conclusions

In preparing this residential we identified a number of outcomes. Reflecting on these we conclude that the residential was an overwhelming success.

- Fully interactive workshop with young people participating fully – achieved
- Young people putting their acquired learning into practice – achieved and demonstrated throughout the workshop and through the feedback received.
- Young people with stronger peer relationships as a result of the residential – achieved. This included the young people being brave enough to show themselves and ask specific, direct questions of us as NCBI leaders to help them negotiate challenges beyond the residential.

- Young people engaging across religion/race issues. Achieved. We were able to have conversations that religion and race issues and the young people were comfortable to do so.
- Young people more confident to speak out against extremist behaviour. Achieved. The young people felt confident to speak out /argue issues they wanted addressed and changed.
- Young people feeling safer on the streets and encouraging others. Achieved. The young people were given tools to equip them to dissipate challenging and conflicting issues they are likely to encounter.

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