

What was the issue?

We are working with a group of young people - 100 Felt Tip Pens Change the Community - the aim of the project being to make positive changes in the community. Within this remit, young people identified a number of changes that they would like to make: more activities, floodlighting in Hangleton Park, a better youth shelter, a youth club, and developing the astroturf in Knoll Park. Through a series of participative sessions and activities we explored the possibilities of each of these options, the time they would take, the amount of funding required and the impact they would have. After a lot of discussion and debate, the group decided that they wanted to focus on developing an astroturf in Knoll Park.

Who did you engage with?

The group were involved in an ongoing process of engagement with other young people about the project and the want/need for it within the community. They prepared a presentation for the Friends of Knoll Park Community Meeting, to present their idea and to ask for their support for the project. They then met with Rob Dumbrill, Parks Project Manager for the Council to discuss their planned development, whether they could have the council go-ahead, to look at potential costs and also any possibility of funding, and to discuss any issues. They also met with another company, Monster Play Systems, to get a quote for the work. The group also sought the support of Community Action, both as backing for the project but also to act as the formal partner/holding bank account for any funding bid that they submitted (as the majority of the group is under 18 they were unable to be formally constituted and have their own bank account).

What did you do?

In addition to the above, the group have been concentrating on selecting appropriate funding bids and applying for them. They are also exploring different fundraising options such as events, appeals and sponsorship. One young woman also did a feature about the group on the local radio station Radio Reverb. In order to improve the current condition of the sports courts, the group also selected colours and members painted the exterior over the summer holidays.

What was the impact?

Through the process young people have increasingly developed a sense of ownership over the project and its potential effects and possibilities within the community. They have become more aware of the different decision making structures within the community and the council and have gained skills in presenting and discussing their ideas. Through the work of the group, adult residents and forums have also become more aware of what young people want to achieve and work towards, and have been very supportive towards this.

The project is still ongoing so it is not currently possible to assess the impact of the astroturf development itself. However, the impact that the group have anticipated it having include: encouraging more people to use the park (which will also have a positive effect on the community cafe); creating a safer space for young people to hang out; reducing the amount of young people playing football in the street; reducing anti-social behaviour; providing a space for local teams to train and develop; and encouraging young people to do more exercise.

What barriers, challenges or points of learning did you identify from the process e.g. any learning here about how to effectively engage with young people within a community setting?

Within the Hangleton and Knoll Project, I think we are already very skilled at engaging with young people within a community setting. The challenges in terms of this project have been in terms of engaging with wider bodies and structures. In terms of fundraising, there are very few funding bids that seem to be open to groups of young people applying, and we have found that even funding bids that expressly state that they welcome funding bids from young people can be exclusionary in

terms of how they ask the questions and the structures that they require to be in place before they will give funding. For example, a common term used within funding bids is 'disadvantage or disadvantaged'. When the group applying for that funding is from within that community/group, they are effectively being asked to comment on their own disadvantage. Other issues have included conflicting agendas, uncertainty and long timescales. While these are unavoidable with a project of this scale, and can also be seen to provide good learning opportunities for how systems work, this can be hard to manage within a group of young people for whom a year can be a really long time. As a youth worker, this is the first project of this scale (the overall project cost is £60,000) that I have been involved in and a number of issues have arisen over the course of the project that I had not anticipated. Were I to take one thing with me to a future project like this, it would be to really emphasise the hard work and the challenges that it will involve. That said, if the group succeeds in their aims, the rewards will be immeasurable.

Written by Helen Bartlett, Youth Participation Worker