



Didcot Town Council - December Report

Executive Summary

The £5000 TRAIN were generously awarded by Didcot Town Council in September 2019 has had considerable value in supporting our youth work (YW) over the past 4 months, through funding our rent and utilities costs – clearly a core requirement for us to be able to deliver our services.

It has been a busy period for TRAIN with a number of particularly positive highlights including:

- Gaining 3 new part-time employees: Youth Workers Lisa, Charlotte and Harry
- Refreshing our weekly provision timetable for the new academic year, with added new programmes: 'Head Start'
- Running a successful October holiday programme
- Strengthening our relationships with key community agencies as well as the town's young people (YP)

Throughout the above and our weekly provision, it has been brilliant to witness considerable signs of positive personal development in many of the YP we have been engaging with, whom we will continue to support into the future to encourage this continued development.

General Update

It was refreshing to refocus our attention to the new academic year, following a successful Summer which included us delivering a programme of positive activities and three residentials to the south of France for our Explore More intensive personal development programme.

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September also came as a new start considering our recruitment of 3 new Youth Workers: Lisa, Charlotte and Harry, with previous staff members Holly and Phillip moving onto new opportunities.

Being at our highest number of staff yet as a team of 6 (4FTE), this clearly illustrates the positive growth of TRAIN over the years. Each new staff member has brought a collective of valuable skills and experience to benefit our work, particularly in detached, youth participation and sports activities. Alongside Justina and coordinated by Alice, each have rapidly adapted to our provision. They have taken up their sessions with great enthusiasm, whilst building positive relationships with YP.



We have increased efforts to reach out to new YP, to ensure all who may benefit from our support are aware of us throughout the town. This has so far included through leafletting and delivering assemblies at Didcot Girl's School. We have had success in drawing many into our group mentoring programmes as a result, also supported by YP meeting us during detached YW and being referred in.

We have equally continued supporting those already engaging with TRAIN, including those who participated in Explore More. Numerous signs of positive personal development have been observed by staff in each, as we have continued encouraging each to build on the skills developed during the experience and to work towards positive goals. These include signs of increased confidence, reduced substance misuse and sustaining and accessing employment and education opportunities. This is also the case for new YP, many of whom have benefited from our support exceptionally quickly and shown great enjoyment in engaging with us during sessions and detached.

Our weekly timetable has continued to comprise a range of sessions, offering various routes for YP to access our support:

1. Detached and Outreach

Having 4 part time Youth Workers has enabled us to expand our detached and outreach YW over the past months. Our detached work involves us approaching YP in locations where they tend to spend their time across the town. Regularly going out on the streets has continued to be a core aspect of our work and particularly effective in supporting us to build trusting relationships with YP.

We have especially been able to increase our outreach delivery - similar to detached but involving us setting up base at a location around the town. Informing YP where we are via social media, we give them the opportunity to come and engage with us. Setting up our gazebo and beanbags, generally in one of the local parks, has also offered a brilliant opportunity for YP to socialise in a positive environment, as well as gain advice from staff. This offers a positive alternative to more negative behaviour many may otherwise be partaking in.

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Both forms of YW have also been particularly relevant for keeping us aware of various matters affecting YP, witnessed and communicated to us during our visits around the town. A particular example is offered by recent escalations of anti-social behaviour (ASB) at the Orchard Centre's new Burger King. In response we have been regularly dropping in during detached and communicating to



YP the importance of respecting the space. We have also offered to deliver training to the restaurant's staff around YP's actions and all Youth Workers have given them their work phone numbers. We also plan to run an additional weekly group mentoring sessions in the new year to offer another positive alternative to ASB for YP to get involved in. The sessions will use different games to explore critical thinking and problem solving amongst those who attend.

Our football sessions have also continued as a particular stream of our outreach work, after being highly valued by a number of YP since being initiated by Phill. These have been beneficial in developing skills in perseverance, self-motivation and team work, as well as in the sport itself. They have also offered a really positive release for the YP, a time to enjoy themselves in a safe, encouraging environment.

2. Mentoring

We have been carrying out weekly mentoring on a one to one basis with a number of YP attending the University Technical College and Didcot Girls' School since the Summer. These have enabled us to offer tailored support to explore and address underlying emotions influencing YP's behaviour, mental health and self-esteem. We have also continued with our group mentoring work, with the continuation of existing groups and the addition of our Head Start programme.

Young Women's and Young Men's Groups:

These two gender specific groups have remained important in offering YP safe environments in which to enhance understandings of topics particularly relevant to their gender group. From discussions to team building and crafts, different techniques have been used to nurture knowledge and thinking, communication and awareness skills. Topics addressed and activities run are also largely influenced by the preferences of attendees.



A variety of sessions have been delivered in the groups since September including:

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- Using interactive website 'Be the Judge' to educate YP on court sentencing, by allowing YP to evaluate various crime and drug related scenarios.
- 'Reach Out': encouraging YP to consider the different services and individuals they can reach out to for support, writing them out onto paper hands as a regular reminder.
- Designing and pitching milkshake creations to develop creativity and problem-solving skills and boost YP's confidence in presenting their ideas.

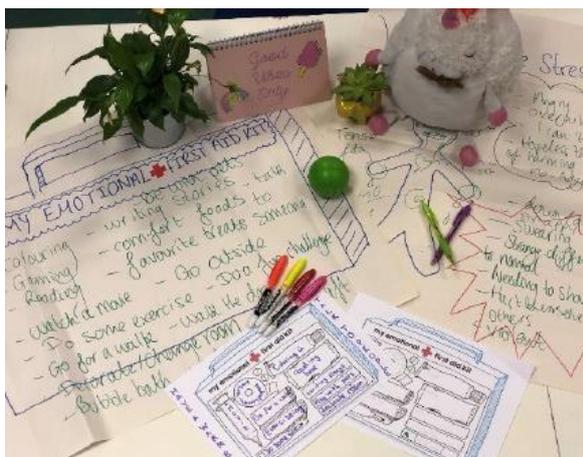
Dinner and Debate:

Dinner and Debate has also continued to be a successful aspect of our provision, since beginning in October 2018. Overarching aims and topics correspond to those for Young Women's and Young Men's, but more typically addressed through group discussions or debates. Mid-way through YP head to local Greggs Bakery to collect donated food, enjoyed communally during continued discussions.

The session has continued to be effective in strengthening the confidence of those attending in sharing ideas with others and learning how to communicate in a respectful manner. We also decided to alter the session format to running one for YP between the age of 11 and Year 8 and another for older YP. During mixed sessions we often noticed younger YP seeming shier to open up. Delivering sessions for narrower age ranges has instead fostered a more comfortable environment for YP to communicate, relate and develop positive, age appropriate friendships. This format has been going very well so far and we feel is likely to have encouraged a number of the new YP who have come along to do so. Particularly recent new attendees have often been quite excitable in their mannerisms during sessions, still adjusting to the group environment and learning the appropriate way to behave and communicate. It has been brilliant witnessing the enjoyment each is gaining from them however and we are confident they will continue growing in their maturity with each session.

Head Start:

It has been exciting to launch a new programme since the beginning of November: Head Start, an early intervention programme of group mentoring sessions for 11 year olds at local primary schools.



This follows on from the increasing need we have recognized in working with YP at the lower range of our 11-18 age range. Each programme comprises 6 sessions focused on either: Promoting Wellbeing and Exploring Mental Health, Positive Behaviour in Schools, Team Building and Self-Esteem. Sessions delivered with Stephen Freeman and Willowcroft Primary Schools have been very well received, staff observing clear signs of positive progression in many of the 16 YP. We look forward to monitoring their continued progression up till Christmas.

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3. Youth Participation

Our Youth Participation work also remains a core aspect of our delivery. Harry has been working with a number of YP engaged on our Participation Pathway, an opportunity to gain greater responsibility in influencing TRAIN'S work - becoming Young Volunteers, Leaders or Ambassadors

The academic year so far has seen those involved leading activities during sessions and planning and delivering community and fundraising projects. This included holding a tombola at Didcot Street Fair. YP acquired a range of prizes from approaching local businesses to ask for donations and support, which they fantastically raised over £150 from. A number also took part in Didcot Town Council's Litter Pick at Great Western Park in October, despite the early start on a weekend and wet weather. It has been fantastic to observe the appreciation YP have for their roles and the confidence they gain from them. We will continue supporting those involved in utilising the opportunities to grow their skills and self-esteem, whilst also supporting more interested in engaging on the Pathway.



4. October Half Term

The last week of October was a particularly busy week as we delivered a number of activities for YP over the half-term. As well as offering YP opportunities to simply enjoy themselves, our holiday programmes have value in contributing towards positive personal self-development and in offering an alternative to ASB many YP may otherwise be participating in. Activities delivered over October included a very well received kickboxing session, a movie night, pumpkin carving session and thoroughly enjoyed trip to Thorpe Park, alongside much detached work - particularly on Halloween night. Responses in post-trip surveys highlighted the benefits of the trip in helping YP make new friends and boosting confidence, well-being and motivations to try new activities.



“Thorpe Park was such an amazing opportunity with TRAIN. The lines were kind of long but it was so worth it” (Reece, 13)

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Other News

Didcot Town Council's Awards Evening

It was fantastic to attend Didcot Town Council's Awards Ceremony on the 18th October with TRAIN volunteers Rhonda and Darren, shortlisted for the John Eldridge Award. We are very fortunate to have a number of incredibly committed volunteers supporting with sessions, fundraising and offering background support. Rhonda and Darren themselves have been key in supporting a number of our regular sessions since Summer 2018 and are hugely positive role models to the YP. We very much appreciate the recognition they gained from the Council, which proved an inspiring night for celebrating all the hugely valuable work being carried out by so many in the town.

Office Move

It was a sad occasion at the end of November to have to vacate our office at 118, Broadway. The space has been deemed no longer safe to work from after our landlords SODC informed us of significant health and safety concerns highlighted in a recent survey. It has been a great shame to leave the office: a second home for YP, staff and volunteers for 11 years.

Positively, we have been able to continue running sessions from Didcot Methodist Church. We are exceptionally grateful to the Church Council for then also offering us an additional room to use as a temporary office. We have now therefore temporarily moved into the Church to carry out our administrative work from, as well as our YW delivery, whilst continuing our search for a permanent location. Despite the unsettling nature of the circumstances, it has been brilliant to have received such kind support from the local community and we are withstanding the circumstances hindering our progress and relationships with all we work with.

Conclusion

In summary, it has been a very busy but hugely positive past few months in many respects. This has largely been supported by the growth in our staff team, which has particularly benefitted in offering greater resilience, diversification and sustainability to our YW delivery. Considering the last few days of the lead up to Christmas, our work is set to include:

- Rewarding those who will have completed the 6 weeks of the Head Start mentoring programme with a trip to watch pantomime Pinocchio at the Cornerstone Arts Centre, tickets kindly donated from the Cornerstone themselves.



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- Running a trip to Oxfordshire Youth's Midnight Ice-Skating.

We will also particularly be working to address recent concerns of local ASB, particularly through our detached work and also supported by the additional weekly group mentoring session we will be running.

Overall we look forward to both continuing to observe the developments of the YP who have been engaging with TRAIN over the past months as well as reaching out to more YP. We are hugely grateful to Didcot Town Council for your ongoing support and recent sponsorship which has been key in supporting our work. We look forward to continuing working with the Council into 2020 to ensure together we can enhance the quality of life for the younger generation, building on Didcot's supportive sense of community as the town continues to grow.

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