



## Youth Empowerment Project

# BARLEY MOW 'UP 2 U' YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 12<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY – 16<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2005 EVALUATION REPORT

## Overview

This evaluation report assesses the impact of a 10 week pilot course for 10 to 13 year old youth from the Barley Mow estate in Gateshead and draws out lessons to be learned to guide future work. Infuse was asked to offer something in this community by two local residents and worked with them to design a course consisting of weekly evening sessions and two weekend residential.

The course changed my life because **“it has made me more confident about myself, I have made more friends, and I have learned new things.”**

- Female Participant

## Purpose

Infuse has been running residential events for young people for over three years and has developed a particular educational approach. When a young person comes to an Infuse event they are lifted out of the familiar world of their family and community and placed in an *environment* in which they are challenged to consider for themselves their own views and beliefs on the theme of the event. If this environment is one in which the young person feels welcomed and accepted, feels safe and secure, it is possible for them to rise to this challenge. Creating such an environment relies on having a staff team that adheres to a set of values and on excellent practical organisation (Infuse has a Statement of Values and set of policies to ensure that these conditions are met).

Being invited to work with young people from Barley Mow gave Infuse an opportunity to test our approach in a new setting. Barley Mow is a Council estate which, like so many others in the country, has a generation of young people that does not know how to relate to the community. It was described by a resident as:

*“... a normal council estate – kids loud, noisy, hanging on the street, nothing to do ... getting worse on the estate – anti-social behaviour, graffiti, broken windows, damaging phone boxes and bus shelters, drug misuse.”*

Working with local residents we designed a course with the following purpose:

*“At the end of this programme, the young people will be empowered to examine who they are as individuals and within their community, with specific focus on understanding anger, assertiveness skills and raising self-esteem.”*



## Action

The 10 week course was broken down into two parts: evening planning and development sessions and two weekend residential. Nine young people aged between 10 and 13 participated and the programme was staffed by six volunteers, including three local residents. A tenth young person dropped out after the third week, but we had *100% attendance* from the other nine (apart from one participant missing just one evening session).

The course began with a weekend residential at Burnlaw – a farm and residential retreat in Northumberland, providing a large, open, rural environment for the young people to explore, live and work. Although less than an hour's travel from Barley Mow, this environment was quite new to the young people. This first dose of something completely different created an excitement amongst the young people and a willingness to work constructively with the staff team. We were then able to lead them on a path that would challenge them to look at themselves in light of their new experiences.

**The most important and useful parts of the course for me were  
"being together and acting as a loving mini community."**

- Male Participant

**"It is so great they make you feel more confident in yourself."**

- Male Participant

The evening sessions provided a forum for the young people to share their experiences from the first residential and the staff team to harness the young people's excitement to support them to plan their own residential experience. The evening sessions used games, discussions, personal reflection and 'take-away' activities to pull together themes that would be used to form the basis of the second residential weekend.

**"One Wednesday, we done Persian dancing, we had very good fun. We then learned Arabic writing. I done my name in Arabic and decorated it with coloured flowers. I really enjoyed all of it."**

- Female Participant

**My message in a bottle to other children like me is "I wish I was there with you to help you or be your friend."**

- Female Participant



## Outcomes

The two most notable outcomes from the course were the development of friendships and an increase in confidence.

### **Friendships:**

The course changed my life because **“made more friends and never been so happy in my life.”**

- Female Participant

My life would have been different if only **“I didn't go to Burnlaw because I wouldn't be best friends with Sarah or Jonathan.”**

- Female Participant

The course changed my life because **“I feel that I can trust people”**

- Female Participant

Most of the participants had lived in Barley Mow all their lives, some living on the same street or attending the same school. Yet in less than 10 weeks they developed friendships that were more important than any they had made in the previous 10 years.

This is not a superficial outcome that could have been achieved through any leisure pursuit. The young people repeatedly demonstrated poor communication and interpersonal skills – verbal abuse and hurtful insults were the standard form of communication. This lack of skills will lead to a constant failure to engage in 'official' or 'formal' settings (such as employment) – for example, two members of our group had previously been excluded from the village youth club for being verbally abusive towards staff. Throughout the course we encouraged the young people to reflect on their communications with each other, including how they feel when others are abusive towards them.

An interesting linked outcome is that some of the young people reported that they were no longer aimlessly hanging about on the streets (an issue high on the list of priorities in countless community consultations across the UK). Quite simply, they now have the capacity to think of more interesting things to do, things that revolve around their new-found friendships.

The course changed my life because **“I am more confident in myself and I've stopped hanging around on the streets as much.”**

- Male Participant

The most important and useful parts of the course for me were **“meeting all the people and now we hang out with each other.”**

- Male Participant



**Confidence:**

The thing I like best about me is **“not a lot.”**  
- Female Participant

I feel more confident because **“I know how to act in sticky situations and I know what to say when in trouble.”**  
- Male Participant

I feel more confident because **“Infuse made me more confident in reading, etc.”**  
- Male Participant

Any work with young people that involves them having new experiences in a positive atmosphere is likely to increase their confidence. However, the wide range of comments from the young people on this theme, and feedback from local residents, leads us to believe that this course had a far more profound impact than is normal. We believe this stems from the framework of values within which Infuse operates. Every member of staff is keenly aware of the right of each young person to investigate truth for themselves, and beyond that of the sacredness and inherent nobility of each human being. While some may find such notions unpalatable, an emphasis on such attitudes and qualities among the staff is indispensable and cannot be watered down.

The course changed my life because **“I have met kind people and I have been kind to people.”**  
- Male Participant

I believe I can make Barley Mow a better place to live because **“I can make people listen to me more.”**  
- Female Participant

**“Their faces have changed.”**  
- Comment from Local Resident



## Conclusion

This was our first opportunity to work with a group of young people from the same community (previous Infuse events have attracted participants from a wide geographical area). Working in this context seems to have increased the impact of our approach and the result of the pilot has confirmed to us the importance of pursuing this kind of project.

It is worth noting some of the differences between this project and the more standard approaches to youth and community work. The current thrust of UK social policy is to consult with young people, or with communities, in order to influence service delivery. While this may seem community-led, the actual paradigm at work is "*find out what the community want and then get service providers to deliver it to them*". Far from empowering people, this approach promotes the culture of dependency in which communities feel it is the responsibility of external agencies to improve their lives. It is what Paulo Freire called "*false charity*" that "*constrains the fearful and subdued, the 'rejects of life', to extend their trembling hands*".

One of the problems Infuse has in securing funding is that we are not interested in consulting with young people to influence service delivery – we are interested in the power that every individual has to take action to change their own lives. Our educational model is based on 'drawing out' each person's natural potential and qualities, rather than 'filling up' the person with knowledge and information. Therefore, young people are the best 'resource' in promoting their own development and the role of Infuse is to facilitate this process.

It will be up to Infuse's Board of Trustees and volunteer staff to decide how to move forward from this pilot. We feel a great desire to continue working with the young people in Barley Mow, and hopefully increase the numbers we can cater for (we already have a waiting list for any future courses). However, all of Infuse's work is delivered by volunteers, some of whom travel long distances at their own expense. The only long-term solution will be training volunteers within Barley Mow itself to deliver these courses.

**"I'm very impressed ... what you are doing is bridging the divide between adults and the young people here in Barley Mow. You are also bridging the divide between people of different cultures, different races and different backgrounds. I'm going to spread your fame far and wide."**

- Kathy King, Local Councillor & Chairperson for Barley Mow Village Hall

**"It will change you from a nobody to an independent trustworthy person."**

- Male Participant