

Fairbridge in Scotland

Active Voices project

The Electoral Commission established the New Initiatives Fund to support and promote new ways of raising awareness about voting and democracy. We have awarded grants to local, community and national organisations working with different target audiences across the whole of the UK.

This evaluation report provides information about Fairbridge in Scotland's Active Voices project funded by the New Initiatives Fund. In the report we highlight the aims, objectives and achievements of the project, and lessons learnt by Fairbridge in Scotland.

Introduction

Fairbridge in Scotland works with some of the most socially excluded young people in Scotland. The Fairbridge Active Voices project was created to work with some of these young people, most of whom are disillusioned with politics and lack a basic understanding of the mechanisms for engagement in the political process, to enable them to use their voices and show them the relevance of politics to their everyday lives.

Aim

The aim of the Young Voices project was to enable disengaged and disadvantaged young people to engage with politics at a local level and in the wider community.

Funding

The project was awarded £25,613 and ran from July 2005 to September 2006.

Target outcomes

The target outcomes of the project were:

- to increase young people's awareness of political structures at local, regional, national and international level

- to produce a training and resource pack including a workbook and accompanying video
- to encourage as many Fairbridge young people as possible to register in time to vote in local and general elections

How successful was the project?

The project was open to all Fairbridge's users, and 34 young people ranging in age from 16–25 took part in one or more stages of the project. In order to fully engage these socially excluded young people, the project was broken down into four stages: an introductory stage to get participants thinking about what politics is and what the issues are; a second stage to encourage them to think about a range of areas affected by politics; a third stage to introduce participants to a different culture and explore issues of race and nationality via a cross-cultural exchange to the Republic of Ireland; and a final stage to provide opportunities to learn about international political issues and the environment.

Second-stage activities included a tour of a mosque, a visit to a landfill site, a look at cooking and how far food travels, and participation in the Festival of Politics at the Scottish Parliament.

Developing and delivering the project was a positive experience for all involved: the young people, staff and Fairbridge itself. Although the number of participants wasn't large, their feedback was positive and suggested that the project was successful in stimulating their interest in the wider world and in issues of current political significance. Three activities were particularly beneficial: a visit to an eco-friendly building to learn about personal responsibility in relation to the environment; a visit to BBC studios in Glasgow to introduce 'politics and the news' to the participants; and a visit to some 'eco-warriors' which showed how ordinary people can take a stand against political decisions they disagree with. When asked the purpose of the activities, participants had varying levels of understanding of why activities were taking place, although most understood that 'awareness-raising' was the intended outcome. Feedback from staff indicated that the activities succeeded in increasing participants' awareness of political issues and increasing their understanding that ordinary people can be involved in political activity. As well as interviews with staff and

the participants, the project was evaluated via reviews of financial information and Fairbridge's own monitoring and evaluation database, which holds personal information about the participants, issues they may have, courses they have attended and any outcomes achieved, as well as feedback on how they progressed through the programme and what they learnt.

There have also been benefits to the organisation resulting from the project, including resources that can be used again; development of contacts with external organisations and agencies; and a greater knowledge of politically relevant activities that can be used in future with other young people.

Good practice

- Staff were sensitive to the fact that politics generally is not appealing to many young people, and so developed activities that involved learning about issues of political significance without explicitly using the term 'politics'.
- The project was closely and comprehensively monitored throughout, providing important background data for the evaluation.
- As well as learning about political issues, the project provided participants with the opportunity to work on a range of other skills.
- Using a number of different methods ensured that all of

the participants were engaged in the project.

- Using visits to give practical examples helped to deepen understanding.
- The staff maintained a flexible approach to the delivery of the project so they could learn as they went along what activities would attract and sustain young people's attention.

Lessons learnt

Projects of a similar nature can learn from the following lessons:

- In order to attract young people to the project the political awareness raising and learning had to be couched within fun activities.
- Due to the difficulty of sustaining participants' interest, half-day activities can be more beneficial than full-day.

Further information

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Further information about the New Initiatives Fund and the wider work of the Electoral Commission can be found at www.electoralcommission.org.uk

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