

## LANDED Peer Education Service Democracy 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 LANDED Peer Education Service's Democracy Project funded by the New Initiatives Fund. In the report we highlight the aims, objectives and achievements of the project, and lessons learnt by LANDED.

### Introduction

LANDED Peer Education Service was established in Lanarkshire in 2002 to provide coordinated peer education that addressed drug and alcohol misuse among vulnerable young people. The organisation trains young people to become peer educators who then go out and run drug and alcohol education events in schools and youth clubs.

### Aims and objectives

The project's objectives were:

- to increase awareness and understanding of elections and government in the UK
- to enable young people to make informed decisions about engaging in elections
- to encourage young people to become more active citizens in their own community
- to empower young people to take responsibility for their own learning
- to establish political education as a viable strand of the LANDED service

### Funding

The project received £42,120 over a 17-month period from November 2005 to March 2007.

### How successful was the project?

The project was delivered with a view to making an impact on young people's engagement in the Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections in May 2007. The target outputs were to:

- establish contact with more than 1,000 young people
- recruit 10 peer educators
- run 12 two-hour training sessions to volunteers on delivering political education workshops
- deliver up to 20 political peer education workshops

Not all these targets were met, as detailed below. The project was evaluated through desk research (review of materials, publicity and written contact with schools), participation in peer educators' training, interviews with project staff, observation of events, and an interview with a peer educator upon completion of the project.

Seven peer educators were recruited (the most effective method being word of mouth among existing volunteers) and trained by the Electoral

Commission's Outreach team using their Do Politics resources. The training was intensive, with 18 two-hour and two residential two-day training opportunities, which gave time for the peer educators to become confident in delivering the workshops.

In total, the peer educators delivered three workshops in schools – two in one school, which requested a second one after the first had been well received by both students and teachers. The workshops comprised games and exercises to raise awareness of democracy, and registration forms were available if young people wished to register to vote after attending the workshop. Both schools were positive about the value the workshops added to the curriculum, and LANDED were disappointed that more schools did not take up the offer of workshops.

Four road shows were delivered in colleges in Motherwell and Hamilton, and in shopping centres in East Kilbride and Cumbernauld, with information and 'freebies' (keyrings, pens, etc.) to encourage people to register. The culmination of the project was the 'An Audience With...' event a few weeks before the 2007 elections, in which more than 100 young people from 12 schools participated, putting questions to representatives from seven political parties. The event was introduced and chaired by volunteers from the project, with support from other LANDED

volunteers. Feedback from the political representatives on the event was unanimously positive. Through the workshops, road shows and final event, the project engaged with more than 2,000 people (twice the target number) and resulted in 500 new voter registrations.

The workshops, road shows and events showed a high degree of participation from attendees. The 'An Audience With...' event in particular demonstrated that young people enjoy discussing politics and democracy when the format is accessible. Even if they chose not to register, young people who took part in this event took time to prepare and research issues, and so are now better able to make a choice about their participation in the democratic process.

The impact on peer educators has been significant. They report having increased knowledge and awareness of politics and the democratic process, increased choice of career and study options, and increased confidence in their ability to deliver peer education programmes.

### Good practice

- Volunteer peer educators recognise that the skills they have learnt from participating in the project are transferable and likely to enhance their participation in other activities.
- All the activities demonstrated a high level of participation

by young people, with well-researched questions and varied discussion.

- Peer education shows that informal approaches to learning are valuable and have the capacity to engage young people.

### Lessons learnt

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

- A long lead-in period is required when aiming to introduce a new approach or learning method in schools.
- Promoting 'added value' approaches to learning in schools tends to depend on local relationships, and so a strategic approach to planning engagement with schools is needed, such as through the Director of Education rather than via individual schools.

### 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](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)