

## Sevenoaks District Council – 'Generation X' 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 the 'Generation X' project funded by the New Initiatives Fund. In the report we highlight the aims, objectives and achievements of the project, and lessons learnt by Sevenoaks District Council.

### Introduction

The project was run by Sevenoaks District Council in partnership with VSU Youth in Action – a local registered charity specialising in youth volunteering, and Kent Youth – a voluntary organisation specialising in peer education.

A group of young people were recruited and trained in peer education and democracy awareness. This group then developed workshops to be used as an educational tool in youth groups and schools, and meetings were arranged between this group and parish, town, district and county councillors.

The project was fully funded by the New Initiatives Fund.

### Aims and objectives

The aim of the project was to get young people to design and deliver a peer education workshop for schools and youth groups throughout Sevenoaks. These workshops aimed to raise democracy awareness in young people aged 16 to 18.

The project's objectives were:

- increased knowledge of the electoral process for 200 young people

- to enable young people to interact with council members and officers to provide a better understanding of local democracy
- to increase young people's participation in local and national government
- to develop links between young people, youth groups, schools and the local authority

### Funding

The project was awarded a grant of £28,991 over a 12-month period starting in April 2005.

### How successful was the project?

The project met all of its stated objectives. They recruited and trained 12 young people from the Sevenoaks district as peer educators, with the involvement of VSU Youth in Action, which meant that the young people could gain the Millennium Volunteer Award. The young people undertook research on local democracy, interviewing local councillors, and family and friends on why they do and don't vote, as well as designing a poster campaign for schools and youth groups to ensure that young people registered to vote. One member of the group

attended a democracy conference with the leader of Sevenoaks District Council. The findings of their research were presented to a meeting of Sevenoaks District Council's cabinet.

The young people then planned a series of 45–60 minute workshop sessions to be delivered in schools and were trained in peer education. This included teaching methods, evaluating learning materials, health and safety, working with different groups and challenging behaviour. Following the delivery of the workshops, the project concluded with a presentation by the young people at Sevenoaks District Council's 'Celebrating Young People' conference in March 2006.

An independent evaluator was appointed to assess the overall success of the project. Both the training sessions and the workshops were evaluated by questionnaire. All of the peer educators reported increased confidence and increased awareness of political and democratic processes. The workshops reached 137 young people in two different schools. Following the workshops, 93% of attendees agreed that it was important to vote, 69% said they now knew more about democracy and politics, and 93% felt that their views mattered during an election. The conference had 160 participants, over half of which were young people.

## Good practice

- the employment of specialist peer education trainers from Kent Youth meant that the young people were fully equipped to plan and deliver the workshops and meet with local councillors
- the use of peer education in the delivery of the workshops helped young people become more aware of their own potential and made the content of the workshops more relevant to those attending
- presenting their work to local councillors improved links between young people and their councillors, and helped the young people to feel empowered

## Lessons learnt

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

- some of the peer educators felt that their training was a bit basic and a little patronising although some admitted that a low level of knowledge had to be assumed at the beginning as not everyone was starting from the same point
- the training for the peer educators was changed from a residential weekend to a series of evening sessions as none of the young people were able to take a full weekend away due to various commitments such as Saturday jobs, etc

## 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)

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