BEARS YOUTH CHALLENGE - Brent Educational Art Recreational Services - is based in Stonebridge, Brent, within the London West LSC sub region. Established in 1991, BEARS’s purpose is to help young people aged 8-25 years overcome the multiple barriers and social exclusion that they experience as a consequence of the physical environment, social networks, family breakdown, crime, the informal economy, underachievement in education or long-term unemployment.

Through a range of projects aimed at “character development, lasting qualities of good citizenship and appreciation and understanding of the positive values of young people’s own community”, BEARS has been able to provide an increasingly important service in the wards of Church End, Stonebridge, St Raphael’s and Harlesden, and recently in the wider area of the London Boroughs of Brent and Ealing.

The organisation has attracted mainstream funding from the LSC since April 2006 and offers an Entry to Employment (E2E) programme for young people needing help with skills in order to progress to other courses, training or employment. The ability to attract mainstream funding is considered by BEARS to be a successful development, the E2E programme being the “first LSC contract held by BEARS without the support of partnership working”.

CASE STUDY: The BEARS Youth Challenge
Range of Projects for 2005/06/07

For 8-14 year-olds
A Half Term Greenhouse Holiday Sports Programme funded by Not Another Drop and Greenhouse is offered (in Partnership with Greenhouse Sports Programme). This programme offers sports activities such as swimming, football and cricket. An evening programme is planned (funding applications in process) to offer a homework club, trips, games, sports and issue-based learning, for example on drug and sexual health awareness.

For 13-16 year-olds
The Multi-Skills Partnership (MSPP) funded by ESF London West LSC is a pre – E2E educational programme, aimed especially at Black boys failing in mainstream education. The programme involves work placements, training and qualifications and, once they have completed it, young people are able to progress to an E2E (Entry to Employment) Programme.

For 15-25 year-olds
The Divert Youth Programme funded by Harlesden and Stonebridge Neighbourhood Renewal Fund provides a range of specially adapted activities that respond to the needs of young people in the wards of Harlesden and Stonebridge. Activities developed in close consultation with the outreach workers include leadership programmes and one-to-one counselling sessions. Advice and guidance offered to young people helps with their progression to employment or work placements, training and qualifications and going to college.

16-19 NEETs.
The E2E programme funded by LSC, offers skills for life and vocational courses leading to a qualification in:
- FA Coaching Certificate: Level 1+2
- Community Sports Leadership Awards
- Literacy and Communications: Skills for Life, Entry 3 and Key Skills, Level 1&2
- Numeracy: Skills for Life, Entry 3 and Key Skills, Level 1&2
- IT/ECDL: Key Skills, Level 1&2 and ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence)

Courses for 16-18 year old NEETs last for 22 weeks or longer; 19-24 year olds can also be considered for E2E enrolment.
**Location**

Currently, BEARS is centrally based in Stonebridge, an area that consists of old estate tower blocks that are being slowly demolished and replaced by more modern housing. The substantial regeneration programme is aimed at providing a safer community based environment for the residents. However, as mentioned in one of the case studies interviews, “to achieve a successful regeneration, more effort is needed to also regenerate the people’ and provide additional facilities for young people to ‘get them off the street’. This includes youngsters who mix with and imitate the behaviour of older groups.

The location does present challenges, as it sometimes acts as a deterrent in terms of recruitment. The provision of the E2E programme requires enrolment from the wider area of Brent and Ealing but due to the reputation of the area, young participants are reluctant to travel to Stonebridge. BEARS is aware of the problem and believes that moving to new premises by the end of 2006 will tackle the issue.

Another challenge is linked with the reputation of the area in relation to young peoples’ chances of getting a job. Interviewees spoke of ‘post-code’ discrimination: “if you want to do something then get out of Stonebridge” or “at the moment Stonebridge is not a very good area, if you go out there you will see a lot police…there is lot of stop and search, there are notices for dispersal orders”. It was added however that “the area does have a lot of potential especially if people can get jobs”.

**Project Participants**

Young people aged 8-25 are the core participants of BEARS projects. Multiple disadvantages are prevalent as the young people are residents of an ‘area with high levels of multiple deprivation’ and very deprived wards. Some are
‘16-19 NEET’ or younger at risk of becoming NEET, some are ‘ex-offenders’, some come form ‘Black, Asian and Minority ethnic’ backgrounds, some are also ‘lone – and often teenage - parents’ and some are ‘long term unemployed’.

The combinations of the above disadvantages increase the barriers and disengagement for the young people who are often characterized as ‘hard to reach’. A more positive explanation was given during the interview with the provider – namely that the young people’s circumstances made it ‘hard for them to access services’. Some of the common challenges encountered include:

- Widespread selling and use of drugs
- Easy money from selling drugs act attracts young people
- Increase of gang and gun culture
- Peer pressure
- Violence amongst the young people and against other residents
- General attitude problems which hinder employment prospects
- Unrealistic aspirations and a lack of understanding of progression

What makes BEARS successful?

1. The provision of formal education
As of April 2006, BEARS has been able to move from the provision of informal education as a personal development provider, to being a registered training provider offering formal and accredited qualifications (through MSPP and E2E projects). The government’s current focus on education coupled with the project’s long experience of working with deprived young people put BEARS in a good position to attract mainstream funding for this major step forward. Additionally, through partnership with other organisations such as Head to Head Training or Bigger Fish, BEARS was able to demonstrate a proven track record of successful delivery of programmes and was able to gain experience, for example in the complicated paperwork involved. BEARS gained the Investors in People Award in 2004, which recognises that the support, training and development provided to their staff is integral to success.

2. Innovative Outreach Work
BEARS’ focus on working with young people within the challenges presented by their local area has enabled the development of coherent and innovative outreach work aimed at recruiting highly disadvantaged and disengaged young people from the local area.

BEARS has developed an experienced and dedicated team of outreach workers who are considerate of young people’s needs. There is a commitment to constantly discussing and reviewing strategies for approaching young people by being present
- in ‘hotspots’, areas with minimal outreach work, including places where drugs are sold and other crimes are committed,
- in areas where young people gather i.e. high streets, sports grounds, parks,
• as residents. The workers are themselves residents of the local area; they are in touch with current local issues and with the situations young people encounter.

To be successful the approach also requires quick assessment of the best way to approach individuals, and sensitivity to gender issues.

BEARS puts emphasis on a ‘Never Give Up’ approach and views work with young people as continuous. Staff regularly telephone, e-mail or text new recruits, young people who have approached BEARS and even participants who have completed their project; all are encouraged to keep in touch. This persistence is what breaks social exclusion according to BEARS staff but it also contributes to the fact that there are no drop-outs from the projects: “we don’t ever give up on young people, because we are the last resort around here, if we give up on them, there is nowhere else for them to go”. Outreach workers re-approach young people if not successful the first time.

Specially designed leaflets have been produced to attract young people. This is especially helpful during outreach work when leaflets play a part in a young person’s decision to engage or not in conversation with the outreach worker.

3. Creative approach to projects and diverse activities
This means encouraging young people to be innovative and creative by empowering them to contribute their thoughts to running the project. Young people at the start of a project set their own ground rules and times.

Organising a range of creative activities that aim to educate, encourage teamwork, involvement with the community, leadership skills and other creative skills is also important. Examples include the ‘Treasure Hunt’, ‘Fact Finding Mission studying Gun Culture’, participation in ‘Young People’s Conference’ held in Brussels and the ‘Xpress Ur-Self’ music project. Another initiative involved organising visits that have an entrepreneurial purpose e.g. the visit to an exhibition of T-shirt design where the designer discussed his work and gave tips on ‘how to start and run your own business.’

4. Presence on the estate
Being located in Stonebridge for more than 15 years has allowed BEARS to develop a highly focused approach of specialised provision. This long-term presence on the estate provides an alternative route to employment and education for the local youth and those up to the age of 24 who are disengaged from mainstream education. Participants often recommend BEARS to other family members or to their friends. It also keeps young people off the street by providing facilities for them to do their homework, use the computers and internet facilities or ask for advice. The lack of youth clubs in the area highlights BEARS’s role.
5. Guidance
This has proved important by carrying out an initial assessment with the emphasis on a one-to-one approach and if appropriate, involving parents and teachers. Readiness to offer advice, even outside working hours, about education options and on all aspects of young peoples’ lives has helped the profile of the guidance staff. At a practical level the project has also assisted with contacting employers and writing CVs and giving advice on interview procedures, dress codes etc.

6. Links with Employment
Targets for BEARS projects include the progression of young participants to other qualifications, work placements and to full or part time employment. BEARS has been able to meet all the targets.

Emphasis is placed on helping people get jobs in the local area. Young people have been able to gain work placements with the local school as school assistants or in local shops, such as hairdressers or at the Post Office. A partnership with Hillside Housing Trust aims to help young people into local construction jobs especially through the current regeneration of the area: “We work with companies that are involved with the construction work here because we believe that the residents should have an input in building their own homes so to take some pride…to say I built this…if I built something then I do not want to destroy it”.

One BEARS participant was helped by Hillside Housing Trust to gain an apprenticeship with a construction company that does regeneration work: “It
was difficult to get the job but once I had my foot into the door and my boss saw how dedicated I was and how much I took it seriously, I could start climbing”. However, the participant explained how difficult it is to gain either an apprenticeship or a job in construction - or indeed in any other business for young people from the area because “people heard about Stonebridge and assume that everyone from Stonebridge is involved … there is some discrimination…when I apply for jobs I never put Stonebridge down, I get more responses in this way.”

BEARS is always seeking to establish links with companies, especially those that employ local people, for example, WHSmith and John Lewis in the Brent Cross Shopping Centre, Stonebridge Regeneration, McDonalds (Harlesden and Wembley), and IKEA. Other employers with links to BEARS include the BBC, Transport for London and the London Fire Brigade.

**Next steps**

BEARS will open a new centre in the Pavilion, which is being built as part of the local regeneration programme and will be within close reach of sports facilities. BEARS aims to put more emphasis on young people and sports, an area of growing demand amongst the young people. The new venue will offer services to even more young people.

BEARS will continue with its outreach work and its commitment of never giving up on approaching young people and helping them out of disadvantage.

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