Stars in the Sky Yorkshire

**Summary:** Stars in the Sky Yorkshire gives people with learning disabilities exciting new opportunities for friendship and dating. Since December 2007 we have run 15 events, resulting in new friendships, and set up 16 dates, leading to 4 longer-term relationships. People with learning disabilities have been fully involved in running Stars in the Sky Yorkshire since it started. We have 50 members and 10 volunteers including someone with a learning disability, and an accessible website.

**Judges’ comments:**

“Great use of mainstream techniques and facilities to help people to meet and form social and loving relationships.”

“Positive interpersonal relationships form the heart of what most people would see as a ‘good life’. It was great to see Stars’ approach to friendship and dating for learning disabled people really paying off. What better outcome is there than lasting and loving relationships?”

“Services and staff come and go, but friendships and partnerships are what sustain us through fulfilling and happy lives and help us through hard times. Service providers in Yorkshire have had the humility to recognise this and do something, with their clients, about it.”

“Safe and fun way to find partners and friends, the most important thing to us all.”

**Karen England, Development Worker at HFT**

**How did you become involved with Stars in the Sky Yorkshire?**

Before I started working here HFT had done lots of research into whether there was a need for this kind of service. Based on the findings a steering group was set up to decide how to move things forward, and HFT/Dimensions funded my post to develop Stars in the Sky Yorkshire (SITSY). I am responsible for developing the project and running things on a day to day basis.

**What was the inspiration behind the project?**

We were aware of a similar project in London that had been successful. We found from our research that there isn’t enough support out there for people with learning difficulties or disabilities to make friends and start relationships and many people are isolated so we felt that needed to be addressed.

**How did you get the ball rolling?**

We started by setting out some core aims then began networking with other local organisations, e.g. Mencap, People in Action, Connect in the North, as well as parents’ groups, local councils, day centres, supported living, residential homes etc. We have representatives from organisations across Leeds and Wakefield on our steering group, with 50 percent of the members having learning disabilities. We gave some presentations to those groups, attended team meetings, and had stands at parent’s events in order to promote SITSY. We designed a leaflet and put together an application pack then we started advertising more widely in local newspapers and...
on the radio. We also have a team of volunteers recruited to provide support. We got a great response from
the start, lots of people said they’d been wanting something like this set up in the area for a long time.

Were there any obstacles? How did you overcome these?
There were some concerns from parents in the beginning but I think that’s natural and will always be the case
with something like this. Once people realised we had good safety measures in place (one-to-one meetings
and events are chaperoned by trained volunteers) they were very encouraging and supportive of the project.

What have you gained from this experience?
I have loved being part of developing SITSY – it’s fantastic to see people develop friendships and relationships
and really see the benefit of the project.

What piece of advice would you give to others who’d like to get involved in this kind of work?
We’ve talked to a lot of people wanting to do the same kind of thing – we’re actually designing a consultancy
package to help people along the way. I think it’s important to get as much research done as possible before
you begin to start work on things. Also, get as many organisations on board beforehand – we already had a
steering group set up so groups across the district were behind us from an early stage and already doing some
campaigning.

More info:
www.starsyorkshire.co.uk
www.citn.org.uk (Connect in the North)
www.peopleinaction.org.uk