

Social Inclusion Working Group: meeting notes

Tuesday 23rd October, 2012

This was another well attended and exciting discussion to develop our programme of work around social inclusion. We covered a broad range of topics.

1. Introductions

Attended by: Chris Morris, Sheri Ostler, Sarah Bailey, Mary Fredlund, Lynn Pashby, Tricia Stone, Donna Beswick, Sue Beswick, Deborah Fox, Alena Benson Camilla McHugh, Antonia East, Kim Antonio, Megan MacMillan.

Apologies: Hannah Thompson, Mark Tarrant, Judith O'Dell, Bel MacDonald

2. Review of notes from previous meeting

- Point was made in relation to 'measuring' inclusion that inclusion in mainstream school setting is tokenistic, that 'Hubs' created in some school settings are more about exclusion than inclusion and more about keeping students quiet and not about properly supporting them to learn

3. Update 'Promoting positive attitudes' – Megan MacMillan, PhD

Megan updated the group on the two main areas she has been working on since the last meeting.

- Systematic review - there was a wealth of research out there on children's attitudes towards disability and so she decided to focus on research which additionally measures contact. She is currently working her way through around 35 articles and there seems to be a theme emerging that 'structured contact' seems to be more beneficial.
- Survey - Megan updated the group on the status of the survey measuring attitudes of children. 20 school across Devon and 1900 children have taken part so far. The main outcomes so far are that contact with other disabled people, high levels of empathy and low levels of anxiety are strongly associated with more positive attitudes. Unfortunately only 2 of the schools are secondary and Megan is hoping to recruit a couple more before the end of this school term, she request that if any members of the group had contacts that would be very helpful. There was general discussion and exchange of useful information.
- Megan moved on to discuss a possible intervention for her project and ideas of what an intervention may look like. She mentioned a recent research project which included surveys and interviews with teachers around the 'single equality duty' which came out in April 2011. This plan requires schools to have in place a plan of and an active approach to improving relations between all social groups; according to this research 70% of schools across Britain do not have a plan in place yet.

- Discussion around ideas of a intervention;
 - 'inclusion' lessons within school curriculum, this is currently happening at St Lukes, Exeter
 - point raised that the earlier a intervention is put in place the better as fear often becomes a barrier later on and it is more difficult to change attitudes in adults.
 - there may be an issue of parents acceptance that the child has a need, their resistance to having a 'label' and whether child is told by their parents that they have one.
 - Teachers may also be reluctant to get involved in anything that would single out or 'spotlight' a disabled child in class
 - for many children there is a perceived stigma to using technology that may help them in a school environment.
 - idea of the concept of impairment which people see as a negative, that in a class environment there is always going to be differences , if each individual is the 'star of their life' and each has 'treasure' inside which they can bring to the class or group this focuses on the positive and the value of each individual.
 - Teachers only receive two weeks SEN training and often may not understand that a certain behaviour from a child is just their behaviour, not them deliberately misbehaving.
- Megan recruited members of the group who may be willing to help her develop ideas for the intervention.

Action: circulate Megan's flyer to group

4. Recap of previous ideas for development of inclusion

Chris recapped on the ideas that have been previously discussed

- measuring social inclusion and related issues – there are often very different reports from parents and children about their experiences of involvement and inclusion.
- qualitative research – families and children's experience of inclusion
- evaluating services that promote inclusion

The group then did a brain storming session for ideas and issues around inclusion. Many ideas focused on inclusion in schools, see below:

- Using communication to measure attitudes
 - Are the child's needs assumed, does the person make eye contact with the child, is the child addressed or is their carer addressed, is the child interrupted
- Differentiation in delivery or differences in meeting different needs of children – treating each child as an individual
- Seeing the behaviour of children with additional needs as 'different' not naughty, or bad parenting
- Attitudes of school staff to the behaviour and needs of individual children.
- Attitudes of those in authority
- Social architecture
- Differences between what's promised and what is actually delivered (for example, by schools or organisations on their websites).
- Dealing with conflict and misunderstanding

- Attitudes of those in the police force – understanding of disabled children.
- The effects of not being heard or understood – on children and their carers.
- Finding places to accommodate children and their carers e.g. after school clubs and activities. There are differences in perception of enjoyment: a child or young person may be enjoying an activity even if they are not enjoying it in the 'usual' way.
- There can be difficulties in finding a group or activity where the child or young person can be involved in the way they want to be.
- Attitudes/understanding of staff in out of school clubs.
- Video links to professionals to help them understand the needs of the child or young person.
- Teacher's understanding of equipment that has been provided for the child and using that equipment in the right way.
- Yellow signs – safe places for vulnerable young people.

Research question ideas from this:

- A training programme for professionals on how to communicate with non-verbal children (see CL hospital communications project).
- Giving teachers or professionals information about children's needs in the form of a video, rather than in a written report. Outcomes: children's experiences of participation, achievement, the experience of the professional.
- Something to raise awareness of specialist equipment provided for the child
- Training or leaflets for conflict resolution.