

Choosing from the menu

There is a range of accreditation options for workers and young people. Rosie Payne describes the choices made at the Young Parents Project.

The Young Parents Project (YPP) works alongside other agencies to enable access to training, development and support opportunities for young parents in the London Borough of Redbridge. The idea of bringing accreditation onto our menu of options came originally from a worker on another project. We were working on a personal safety project and she said, “Why not do it as a Youth Achievement Award?”

Cautious start

I was initially reluctant, as I thought the system would be complicated, with too much ‘paperwork’, and would not suit many of the young people we work with, who can lack motivation, after experiencing difficult times in the formal education system. Despite my reservations, the Youth Achievement Award (YAA) was our starting point for accreditation.

YAA proved to be a sensible place to start. On a practical level, the YAA licence is not too pricey(!) – and there isn’t too much paperwork! We also soon found out that the materials are not dependent on high levels of literacy, which is vital for us. For anyone working with young people, the basic concepts of participation and peer learning are also easy to get a hold of.

For a young person who is no longer a part of mainstream education, it’s valuable to have informal settings, where you can find out more about what’s available. Being part of a regular Award Group session means that young parents are getting used to turning up and sticking at something.

Further choices

Since introducing the YAA, we have gone on to offer other accreditation options, including the Get Connected NVQ, the BTEC Peer Education and Peer Mentoring qualifications and Open College Network programmes. We also offer short programmes, such as 5-week Parenting and Keep-fit programmes and a four-week Healthy Eating course. We’re even running GCSE projects based in our premises.

Get Connected and the BTEC programmes require much longer term commitment than the YAA, so trying out the YAA is a good way for them to find out if the more ambitious programmes are for

them. From our point of view, running these programmes means that we are able to offer progression within the same environment.

I don’t want to present it all as too straightforward. It’s not easy to engage the young people we work with in structured learning. Like many youth projects, we are funded to work with them specifically because mainstream programmes are not managing to reach them.

But patience can be rewarded. We worked with one young woman for over four-and-a-half years. She didn’t finish much



over that time, but she did complete a working with children module, including going on a placement – a commitment way above anything else she had done.

Other successes for us are easier to point towards. We have a young woman, now at uni, training to be a midwife; and one of our current staff members is a young mother who has already been through training with us, including the Peer Education BTEC, and is now working on her NVQ in Advice & Guidance.

Plus points

In many ways, part of our motivation for offering accredited programmes is to do with the sustainability of the project. With increased pressure from funders for ‘accredited outcomes’, we recognise that doing this makes us more attractive to supporters. But the benefits to young people are also clear. The most significant benefit, from our experience, is that they get back their motivation for learning. About 70% of the young people we work with haven’t completed their mainstream education; having a chance to achieve accreditation in a non-formal setting means that they increase their own options for the future.

Rosie Payne is Project Manager with the Young Parents Project, Ilford.



Where have I been?

BORN ON...

On the line mark some crosses and write some important things that you have done or experienced in your life.

Planning tip: Some of the things you mark on the line may remind you of things you would like to do again or share with others. It may give you ideas for things you might like to change or improve.

Taken from Get Going!

TODAY!



Tried and tested

Two workers share their experiences of the Youth Achievement Awards.

Kara Balmer works with Halewood Project Youth Trust in an After School Club.

I first heard about the Youth Achievement Awards (YAA) last September, when I started working in the After School Club, which is for young people aged 11–16. I was interested in the idea, because it’s a programme that can be used across a broad range of activities.

I did have questions, however, about how young people would record and evidence their achievements – and about whether young people would be interested and motivated enough to do the work that involved in completing their Award booklets and portfolios.

The YAA training helped address some of my worries; it was especially helpful on giving ideas on how to collect evidence.

The day after the training, we ‘got the ball rolling’ for seven young people who started their Bronze Youth Achievement last September; we’re expecting to have six young people who will achieve their Award this August. I’m really impressed with what the young people have achieved. Working with an Award Group has shown them that they can work well together, and they enjoy taking part in the activities and portfolio building. The Award recognises young people’s achievements through taking part in activities that they do during a club session, so it doesn’t really add to our workload. The way the programme works also enables me to evaluate and reflect on my own role, to see what went well and what didn’t.

Looking back on this first group, the main learning point for me is that we need to make collecting evidence an ongoing thing and not make portfolio building and completing the booklet a chore. I’m also going to be more active in selling the benefits of the Youth Achievement Awards, as it can have real value when people are looking at going to college or getting a job.

Stephen Sullivan uses Youth Achievement Awards to accredit young people’s learning on the Save the Children project ‘Saying Power’.

Saying Power recruits 16-21 year-olds to work as Trainee Project Workers in community settings around the UK. They are employed to set up local projects, based on local needs. They are allocated their own budget to develop the projects. Trainees have mentors, but a key part of their support comes through their peers in the YAA Award Group.

The idea of having their learning accredited came very much from young people, when external consultants were reviewing the work of Save the Children projects. The recommendation, which we have taken on, was to use the Open College Network and the Youth Achievement Awards. Given the level of responsibility they were taking in their local projects, we decided that, for YAA, Trainees in Saying Power should work at Platinum level.

The participatory approach of the Awards fits in well with the whole ethos of Saying Power. The Award Group comprises the Saying Power Trainees from across the UK, who get together regularly to support each other. Given the amount of travel (and cost) involved, it is vital that these sessions provide ‘value for money’ in terms of mutual learning and support.

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