



Encouraging acceptance

Educating young people about disability will change the future, argues [Laura Perkins](#).

It is an unfortunate fact that most disabled people will have had some experience of being bullied because of their disability. To tackle such instances of bullying, it is important to promote inclusion and attitudes of acceptance. Targeting education programmes at young people before they have developed prejudices around disability will encourage more constructive attitudes to disability throughout society in the long term.

Deafblind UK provides support to thousands of people throughout the country who face life without adequate sight and hearing. We believe that only by raising awareness of the disability will the quality of deafblind people's lives improve.

Insight and empathy

Deafblind UK's Education Programmes, which are run at The National Centre for Deafblindness in Peterborough, aim to give young people an unforgettable insight into deafblindness, while encouraging a positive attitude to disability. The programmes involve a range of simulation activities, where youngsters wear blindfolds and ear defenders and try to perform everyday tasks such as making a drink or a sandwich, or trying to get around. The exercises increase awareness of deafblindness as a disability but also help to develop empathy.

By far the most popular activity is meeting a deafblind person. The young people get to listen to the deafblind person while they tell them a bit about their life and their disability. They then

learn the Deafblind Manual Alphabet (a tactile form of communication used by people with a sight and hearing impairment) and use the Manual to talk to the deafblind person.

Through this experience young people gain a unique insight into the challenges that deafblind people face on a daily basis. More importantly, they realise that deafblind people are just the same as them, only they have problems with their sight and hearing. As Louise Hill, Youth Worker from the Unity South Project commented: 'meeting the deafblind person was the most valuable aspect of the visit, the young people had stereotypical views broken down.'

Accepting difference

Graham Hicks is deafblind and works as Head of Challenges for Deafblind UK, he also gets involved with the Education Programmes by meeting the young visitors. Graham was bullied at school and at college because of his disability. He believes that it is easy for people to pick on someone who they see as being different, but thinks that this stems from a lack of understanding.

As Graham says: "The programmes help to give kids a better understanding of disability. They have a positive effect because they teach young people to see the person and not just the disability. The young people leave here with an understanding that someone with a disability has the same right to respect as anyone else."

Graham's ideas are confirmed by Guy, a Year 8 student, who commented: "I have learnt to have more respect for deafblind people and disabled people in general." Through widespread awareness, more and more members of the younger generation will grow up with a positive and inclusive approach to people with disabilities. Laura Perkins is Education Coordinator with Deafblind UK.

Peer support

An interview with Rachel, a 15-year-old peer supporter at a school in Herefordshire.

IS BULLYING A MAJOR PROBLEM AT YOUR SCHOOL?

Rachel: I would say 'yes' among the younger years. As you get older and more mature, bullying becomes less of a problem.

HOW DO YOU HELP PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN BULLIED?

We let them talk about it, because we feel bullying is the repression of somebody's voice. When they talk about it they feel much better and part of the solution. They feel mentally stronger.

HOW WELL ARE YOU TRAINED?

We have a year's training in different skills: listening and talking about our own problems, our workers are there for us 24/7 they are excellent and never quit.

CAN YOU NAME THREE KEY POINTS TO A GOOD PEER SUPPORTER?

Being a good listener is the most important thing. You also need to be compassionate and empathetic; you have to put yourself in their shoes to understand how they are feeling. It's also important to be impartial.

IS EVERYTHING KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Yes. If there is something that is really difficult for us we can talk to Jacqui (our peer supporter) and she will help us with the problems, but still keeping confidentiality, as no names are mentioned.

WHAT DO YOU DO TO GET PEOPLE TO CONFIDE IN YOU?

We let them start; we don't push them into talking to us. We make them feel that they are in a very safe environment through our body language and skills.

WHAT YOU ADVISE A VICTIM OF BULLYING TO DO?

Definitely talk to somebody about it. There's no point bottling it all up because in the end you will explode under pressure!

ADVICE TO A BULLY?

Stop. Tell someone about your issues, which will help you realise why you are bullying. Try and realise why you're bullying someone and stop!

The receiving end and Peer support are both edited from the pages of InSITE, the e-magazine written by and for young people aged 13-25 in Herefordshire. InSITE (www.insitemag.net) is part of Youth Times, a Rural Media Company project.