

Sutton High School: Citizenship Day, Tuesday 31 January 2006

Summary

Citizenship Day was organised to encourage young people to participate in local decision making and take responsibility for their own communities. The involvement of many local organisations gave the students an insight into partnership workings and how organisations cooperate to achieve sustainable outcomes.

Background

Voting figures, both nationally and locally, are in decline. Councillors felt it important to try and engage young people at an early age to encourage community involvement and incorporate it into our culture.

The project was initiated by Councillor Peter Shephard in his mayoral year (1999/2000), to encourage local primary schools to take an interest in the workings of the borough council. The teachers were supplied with resource packs incorporating exercises about how democracy works; election procedures; and the role of the local council. The student then carried out their own elections and held a junior council meeting at the borough's council chamber with some of the local councillors.

Because of a need to follow the project into high school and give it some continuity, the citizenship days came into being and have developed to incorporate as much partnership working as possible.

Citizenship Days

The format of the day was devised to offer coverage of issues involved in the workings of the partnership. These included heart disease and obesity (primary care trust); Fair Trade (Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council); playgrounds (Groundwork); anti social behaviour (police service, fire service, the youth offending team at Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council).

Morning

The morning was structured as a conference day, with the students splitting into small groups and discussing their allocated case study with support from 'experts' from the participating agencies.

The teachers who took part had attended planning meetings in the months running up to the event and had a clear understanding of their role on the day. During the workshops the students and experts spent time discussing the issues and putting together a presentation to show their understanding

They presented to their peer group and advisers, who decided which team showed the best understanding and awareness of the topic being discussed. Those chosen as winners received prizes of MP3 players and book vouchers from npower Cogen, the event sponsors.

Afternoon

During the afternoon session workshops were held by those involved in the community safety partnership. These included police service; fire service, Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council youth offending team; primary care trust and Cheshire County Council.

The workshops discussed the strengths and weaknesses of anti social behaviour orders. The young people learned how they are incorporated into the criminal justice system; how they are used by various agencies; why they are issued; and the intended effect of the orders.

After the workshops, a formal debate was held with all students taking part. The question for debate was held with all students taking part. The question for debate was 'Do anti social behaviour orders have a beneficial effect on local communities?' A vote was taken after 45 minutes of good debate. The students voted that 'Yes, ASBOs do have a beneficial effect on local communities' by 98 yes votes to 48 no votes.

Measurements were used to assess the success of the project

The students evaluated the event through the attached evaluation form. When asked: 'What do you think was the most valuable lesson learnt through the event?' one reply was: 'To respect and value the opinions of others.'

For us as co-ordinators of the event, this was the exact outcome we hoped to achieve. If young people can 'respect and value' others, it offers a hopeful grounding for the future of our communities. If we as facilitators can help to implement this, we will have met our priorities and served the local citizens well. A debriefing meeting was held for all the 'experts' who had taken part to voice their evaluation of the day. Most of the feedback was positive and some constructive criticism will assist in future development.

Key Outcomes

- to give young people a deeper understanding of the workings of local government and associated partners
- for partners to engage with young people regarding their own personal agendas
- for young people to get an insight into how the local authority works with other agencies in decision making

- making partners more approachable to young people and giving them a contact for future involvement
- creating a sense of community ownership for young people, encouraging them to take a more active role in the running of their local area
- encouraging young people to be more aware of the impact they, as a group, have on their local area and society as a whole

Further information

For further details of this event or the other aspects of the Citizenship Project at Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council please contact:

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