



A not so trivial pursuit

Right Here Sheffield, a multi agency partnership led by YMCA Whiterose and the Children and Young People's Empowerment Project (Chilypep), has been supporting young people to take action around mental health and well-being.

Right Here Sheffield's STAMP (Support, Think, Act, Motivate, Participate) group is comprised of young people from Sheffield with a mission – they want to make life better for young people who experience mental health difficulties and they've come up with some surprising ways of doing so, including designing and launching their own mental health board game called 'Dare You Share?'.

The advisory group, one of three young people's groups, now informing the work of the Right Here Sheffield project, secured funding from National Lottery Awards for All to develop the game into a finished product, employing a graphic design company to give it the polish and professional quality it deserved.

How did STAMP come together?

The Right Here Sheffield youth group, STAMP, was created to advise and guide the strategy and decision making of the project, a partnership between White Rose YMCA, and the Children and Young People's Empowerment Project (Chilypep); NHS Sheffield; NSPCC and Sheffield City Council. The young people in the group help the project to make decisions about ways to fund and deliver good services for young people's emotional well-being.

17 young people have been involved in the STAMP group since it began three years ago, the majority of whom have personal or family experience of mental health difficulties. Over the same period Right Here Sheffield has engaged over 400 young people in a range of therapeutic and awareness raising activities.

Building on sound foundations

Says Laura Abbott, participation manager for Chilypep: "Originally there was a group of young people that Chilypep was working with who'd identified mental health as being a huge issue for young people in Sheffield, based on research they'd done. They came to us and said that they wanted to make improving young people's mental health a priority, and they wanted us to do something about this."

When the funding bid for Right Here was being prepared, the Sheffield partnership was able to draw on the views of those young people some of whom also attended the initial applicant interviews alongside staff.

The 'Dare You Share?' board game is only one part of the work that the STAMP group have done over the last three years. They have produced a range of anti-stigma postcards for young people, carried out peer research around mental health and stigma, contributed to the local Time to Change campaign (their work is now a best practice example) and taken part in a range of community events to promote good mental health. Another of the project's young people's groups, 'Y-act' has produced an anti-stigma DVD called "Stigma Deleted", which complements the range of materials produced by STAMP.

"When we first came together as a group we were involved in quite a lot of decision making and steering the project," says Emma Hinchliffe, a young person who has been involved with STAMP from the start. "A lot of us had experience of the mental health field, whether it was our own personal experiences or having parents with mental health problems. We were coming up with lots of ideas and we wanted to move on and help put them into action. We were looking at our project supporting us to do that. We wanted to do something that was really creative and would help generate discussions about mental health in Sheffield, and that's where the idea for the board game came from."

How did they make a mental health board game?

Armed with that initial idea the group worked together with project workers from the Right Here Sheffield partnership to secure funding from Awards for All, to enable them to take the work forward. Over a residential weekend, the group hammered out the final form of the game before commissioning Nottingham-based Company, Fifteen Design, to make it a reality.

The game takes the form of a mental health theme park, filled with attractions corresponding to different experiences or ideas. It's a strong concept, given a slick execution by employing a professional design company to bring it to life. Of the game itself Laura Abbott says: "The theme park represents life's ups and downs. You've got different things there like hall of mirrors, which might be people's own issues around their own appearance; things like rollercoasters; a haunted house that's around bereavement. There are cards that you read and discuss as you go along and there are 'stamp out stigma' cards which have facts or myths to get young people thinking about some of the discrimination that people with mental health problems might face. The whole purpose is to get people discussing mental health"

How have people responded to the game?

Laura is impressed with how much young people have liked the game. It was piloted "with a few groups of young people, one of which was actually a mental health service users group," she says; "It actually went down so well with them that they decided that they also wanted a therapy group because the group work element of playing the game and the way they had supported each other in the process had brought them closer together. Teachers have also given very positive feedback.

Cherry Smith, Project Manager of Right Here Sheffield, is similarly impressed: “It's so good at is it immediately seems to break down barriers and enable young people to trust each other and share experiences very early on. You almost wouldn't expect that to happen with a group of new young people who don't know each other but it seems to enable them to open up quite honestly and feel safe to do that. Plus, it's fun, it doesn't feel heavy. It doesn't really feel like you're learning as such, but you are.”

What is needed to make good projects like this happen?

Right Here Sheffield is a partnership between a number of local partners and those partners and young people. While there can sometimes be tensions, the partnership delivers something that the individual partners could not deliver on their own. This linking up in Sheffield has allowed young people to benefit from a number of different inputs, from training to counselling.

Both the STAMP group themselves and the professionals involved in supporting them agree that the supportive environment created by staff is a huge part of getting things like 'Dare You Share?' to happen. Says Emma: “To have been part of the STAMP group has really raised my awareness. We took on our own projects as well as being involved with decision making. They were really open for us doing that. It's helped me understand more around different mental health problems. I've got involved with things I wouldn't have got involved with before. It's made a real difference to me just making friends, being able to support each other and knowing that when we're involved in decision making like when we're interviewing for staff and things that our points are valid and we're equally important in making the decisions.”

Emma also feels that the fact that Right Here Sheffield is part of a national programme has helped: “Being able to see what the other projects are doing as well as what we're doing locally really provides you with that additional support. It opens your eyes as well because you can share a lot of the stuff that we're doing; get to know what each project is doing and share what's working and what's going well with each other.”

Laura Abbott stresses that the Right Here Sheffield partnership has seen training as vital in helping young people to take steps forward, such as doing their own projects. “We deliver different sorts of training that they feel will help them not only with the project but also with their confidence. You get young people saying they really want to change things but they don't think that'll ever happen. We've got different ways of working which will help us identify alongside them what their needs are in terms of being able to reach their ultimate goals. It's really meant to be joint working between staff and young people. We want young people to lead the project but they need the skills to be able to do that.”

Hopes for raising their game

Right Here Sheffield has high hopes for the game, but a major challenge is the cost of producing and distributing it. “At the moment it works out at about £80 a game and we just can't afford that” says Laura Abbott. “We're sending them out free at the moment but on loan, and we've love to go mass. Time to Change (the £17 million national

mental health anti-stigma campaign) are looking at it as a resource that they could potentially support us to roll out, but nothing's been set in stone. We are looking at various options and trying to collate all of the feedback so we could put in some bids or find a very nice rich board game maker to help us do something with it!"

Mark Brown, Social Spider

