



High School Congress 29th January 2010

Title – “Making Positive Changes Happen”

Participants – 56 Young People from 13 High Schools plus
12 Young people facilitating from Birches Head High School.

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Introduction

The first High School Congress took place on 29th January 2010 and was hosted by Birches Head High School in partnership with the Children and Young People's Trust Engagement Service.

Early in 2009 several organisations met on a few occasions to form a multi-agency planning team for a High School Congress, but various challenges hindered the progress. Namely: -

- Co-ordinating dates and times when young people from a range of schools could meet up alongside staff from different agencies to plan and prepare for the event
- Amalgamating the processes used by the various agencies around obtaining parental consent and other practicalities
- Difficulties with budget contributions

Time passed without further progress, therefore, as our service led on the Primary and Special School Congress we approached Birches Head High School as they had been fully involved in the planning meetings and together we put forward some proposals and a deadline for agreement from the rest of the multi-agency planning team in order to get things moving.

There were no adverse responses to the proposal so it went ahead. Planning focussed on meeting the needs of the Children and Young People's Trust and ensuring that the young people were truly engaged throughout the process. With this in mind we looked at the five ECM outcomes as these were at the core of the Children and Young People's plan. It was felt that two of the five outcomes were often overlooked (Positive Contribution and Economic Wellbeing), while the young people agreed they felt that consulting on both simultaneously was too adventurous for their first time and opted to look at 'Positive Contribution'

Sincere thanks to the following named people for making this event a reality. Jill Shaw from Birches Head High School worked with the young people volunteers from her school to plan and prepare for the event. Tim Davies from VAST supported where needed i.e. staff presence at the rehearsals for the young people. Andrea Olenczuk from VAST took care of the invitations, parental consents, catering and publicity. Lesley Boughey, Engagement Service Manager covered the budget. The young people facilitating were the real stars, they were recognised on the day with certificates and vouchers.

Prior to the event, the young people facilitating interviewed services and members of the public to ascertain their views on the City. These views were presented as a DVD at the start of the event followed by the opening speeches from the young people then culminating in a series of workshops designed and delivered by once again these same young people. This process was used as the young people strongly stated that they did not want adult 'guest' speakers

Thirteen of the seventeen High Schools in the City attended, of those schools missing, one was from cluster four and three were from cluster two. All the participants and the facilitators were from year nine apart from two facilitators who were from year 11. The two year 11 pupils had previous experience in presenting so opened the event and mentored the year nines.

Theme – ‘ Making Positive Changes Happen’

Aims of the day:

1. **Workshop 1 – post it / discussion exercise**
 - a. To find out what they would like to see changed in Stoke-on-Trent
 - b. To find out what they like about Stoke-on-Trent
 - c. To find out what they do to help others
2. **Workshop 2 - Diamond Ranking - volunteering**
 - a. Prioritising volunteering opportunities in order of importance
 - b. Identifying what volunteering opportunities young people would like made available to them
3. **Workshop 3 - Kinaesthetic voting – statements and value lines**
 - a. 17 statements with which to agree or disagree
 - b. 7 statements with a choice of four possible answers
4. **Afternoon workshop - Dice activity**
 - a. Ideas for future congresses

Findings - Workshop 1

Two key themes emerged from workshop 1 part a – “would like to see changed in Stoke-on-Trent”

1. Activities for teenage young people
 - a. Places to go to reduce likelihood of hanging round streets
 - b. Parks with more equipment, better equipment
2. Environment – cleaner & safer
 - a. Smarter and safer bus station, homeless people in and around the area
 - b. Less litter and graffiti
 - c. Safer parks and streets
 - d. Do something with the derelict buildings,

Four key themes emerged from workshop 1 part 2– “what is likeable about Stoke-on-Trent”

1. Stoke FC
2. Good/friendly people
3. Famous links - Robbie Williams; Phil Taylor
4. Hanley Shopping centre

Six key themes emerged from workshop 1 part 3– “things they do to help others”

1. Personal & Emotional support (Helping friends) (Dispute resolution)
2. Charity work (fundraising or otherwise)
3. School/homework
4. Volunteering (libraries) (community events)
5. Environmental work (recycling) (litter pick) (reducing co2)
6. Family & home (cleaning/cooking) (walking the dog)

(These six themes are ranked according to the number of times they were raised by the young people. 1 = most popular response, descending to 6 = least popular)

Findings - Workshop 2

1. Workshop 2 (part 1) required the young people to rank a set of 28 cards depicting different volunteering opportunities in order of importance. Unknown to the participants the 28 volunteering opportunities identified on the cards fell into one of four categories, family, school, community or national.

The table below shows which category each group of young people's top 10 volunteering opportunities came from. As can be seen, the young people rate national volunteering opportunities as more important than volunteering opportunities in and around the family.

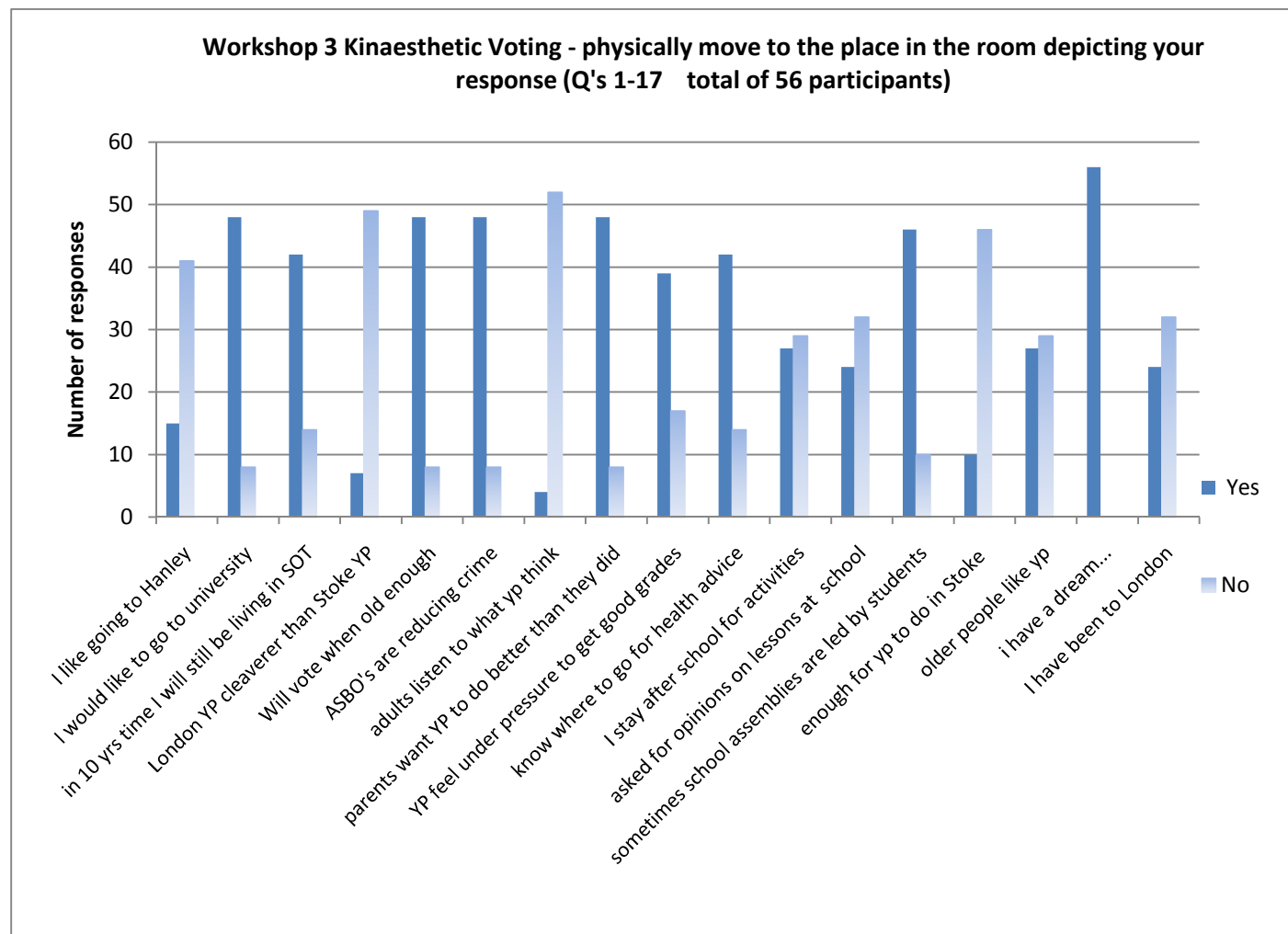
	Gp 1	Gp 2	Gp 3	Gp 4	Gp 5	Gp 6	Gp 7	Gp 8	Gp 9	Gp 10	total
family	0	0	4	5	3	2	0	2	0	0	16
school	3	3	2	2	0	3	2	3	2	3	23
community	3	3	1	1	2	3	4	2	4	4	27
national	4	4	3	2	5	2	4	3	4	3	34
Total	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	100

2. Workshop 2 (part 2) – “Volunteering opportunities wanted”

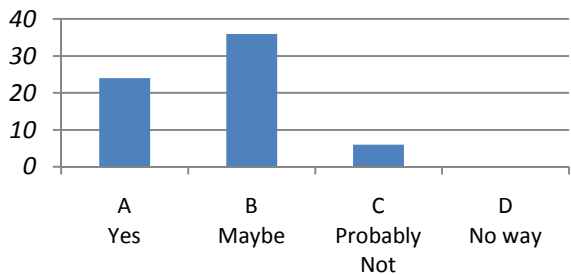
- Helping to plan and deliver a better future for others
- Doing things to help build the community spirit
- Improving the environment with litter picks, reducing co2 and recycling
- Helping charities to take care of the elderly and the vulnerable

Findings - Workshop 3

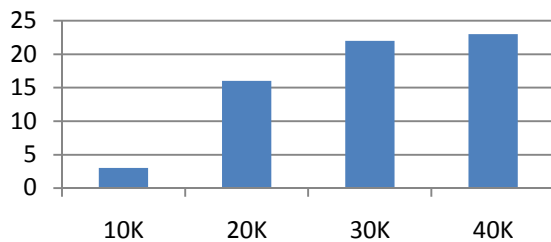
Questions 18 to 24 had 64 participants as some of the facilitators joined in.



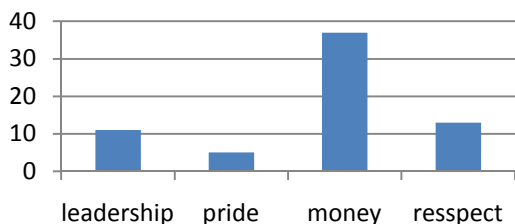
Q18. I think I've got a bright future



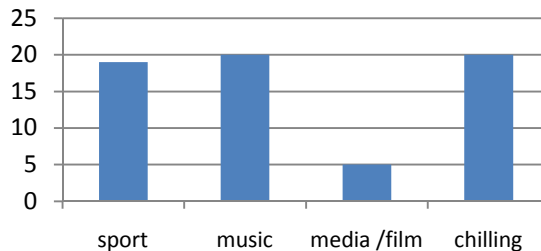
Q19. when I'm 30 I will be earning



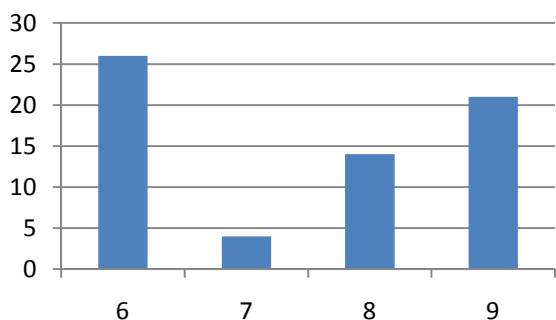
Q20. Stoke needs this the most



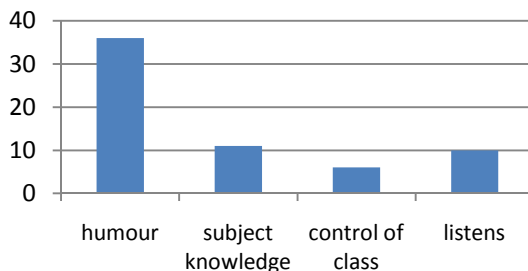
Q.21. Stoke needs more places for



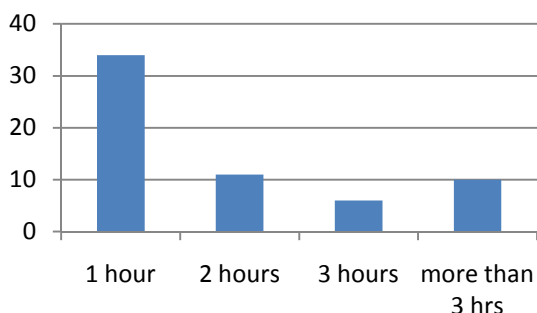
Q22. the best year at school so far is..



Q23. the number one skill for a teacher is..



Q24. I would give up this much time per week to help others



"Writing on notes what I would like for Stoke-on-Trent"

The statements in the speech bubbles are extracts from the young people's evaluation forms

"I hope the thoughts and contributions we made will actually be done rather than just being a waste of time"

"I would like to come to another congress on another subject"

"I enjoyed meeting other students the same age as me and seeing what they do and what they would like to do"

"At first everyone was nervous"

Evaluation

The results from this consultation didn't reveal anything we hadn't heard before and had put measures in place to rectify, so the issue is why are young people still saying there aren't enough places for young people to go and chill with friends; for parks to have more and better equipment; for the environment to be cleaner and safer? As this event was designed and delivered by young people the consultations didn't investigate far enough the reasons behind these views so only assumptions can be made. Perhaps they are not fully aware of just what is available to them and our next step is around communication, maybe they have preconceived ideas as to what an activity entails and therefore opt out of exploring that opportunity any further. Peer support as you would expect emerged as a key theme in workshop 1 part 3. Peer influences are powerful in a young person's life, if your friends approve then you are more likely to take part in activities.

Our young people rated national volunteering opportunities as being of higher importance than volunteering in and around the family. Once again we can only speculate as to the reasons why, do they see helping the family as a duty/responsibility and not volunteering or do they see this as volunteering without the recognition or prestige that you get from community or national opportunities? Volunteering opportunities wanted focussed on improving the quality of life starting with the community then the environment and not forgetting the vulnerable.

The kinaesthetic voting has provided some interesting reading however due to the methodology of the approach young people may have followed the crowd rather than voted honestly. So just as with the other findings above, further exploration as to their reliability and the reasons behind the views expressed is needed. For example, in workshop 1 'Hanley Shopping Centre' was a key theme as a thing they most liked about Stoke but in the Kinaesthetic voting the majority voted 'no they don't like going to Hanley'. Alarmingly the second highest majority vote was that 'no, adults don't listen to young people': but who are they talking about when they say 'adult' - practitioners, parents or both?

Evaluations were carried out using a questionnaire which once completed the young people swapped for a goody bag so all the evaluations were handed in. 95% said that they enjoyed the event.

Dice Activity – ideas for future congress

The young people came up with ideas for future congress and then had to put a sticker on their three favourite choices from all the suggestions made. Three key themes emerged, the most popular alluded to emotional wellbeing with 105 votes (each time it was written as a suggestion it was counted as a vote and every sticker put onto the idea was counted as a vote). The second most popular was activities for young people with 92 votes and the third popular theme alluded to politics and citizenship with 74 votes. However, 17 votes in this category referred to bringing back Woolworths!

Next actions – Many of the schools who attended the Congress expressed an interest in facilitating the next one therefore the schools will be contacted to look at the way forward. Lessons learned from this first congress include

- Meeting with the young presenters/facilitators this time around to ask for a couple of volunteers to help mentor the next group of young presenters/facilitators
- Team building between the young people and the VAST Children and Families staff team
- Skill development, training and support for the young people in consultation and scribing
- More shared planning meetings so that the needs of the Trust are met along with the wishes and aspirations of the young people
- Discussions have begun with the Community Development Foundation as to linkages between High School Congress and the Take Part Pathfinder as this project aims to encourage more active young citizens and volunteers and involve young people in decision making around issues that affect them.

There is a full report which captures everything the young people said or told us on the day. This will be sent to all the schools so that they can use the information in their school assemblies, school council meetings and in the classroom to ensure that all the young people are aware that they have been listened to. For a copy of the full report or further information about anything within this summary please contact us, using the details below.

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