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COVO Connecting Voices

The Issue

Transition from primary to secondary school is difficult and challenging for all children. For those with existing behavioural problems or at risk of expulsion from primary school the challenge is far greater

There is a strong body of professional opinion among teachers that pupils' experiences of transitions can make a difference to their commitment to learning and to their progress. According to a Department for Children, Schools and Families report it is estimated that up to 2 out every 5 pupils fail to make expected progress during the year immediately following the change of school.

Early social and emotional difficulties can contribute to a child's chances of developing more severe difficulties in secondary school and in later life. Problems that are often in the public eye include truancy, exclusion from school, early pregnancy, drug and alcohol misuse and involvement in crime. Children who are likely to have such difficulties can often be identified at primary school.

The Response

COVO Connecting Voices works closely with Year 6 students who are disengaged or are at risk of exclusion and are preparing for the transition to secondary school.

Established in 1999, the organisation develops and delivers training programmes addressing, conflict, and underachievement in education through emotional literacy. Current projects include: Play and Behaviour – training children and staff to develop playtime to reduce bullying and conflict in schools, Behaviour Strategies – supporting staff and pupils to develop their own Behaviour policies, facilitating workshops to support the social curriculum, looking at increase awareness of the self and developing social responsibility in young people and training and inset days for teachers and youth workers around emotional literacy, behaviour management and play.

Through the Transition programme the group aim to engage vulnerable students by developing their confidence and skills to be able to: articulate their feelings about transition and to develop coping strategies to deal with change. The group do this through:

Referral & Consultation, working with the teachers and Special Educational Needs Coordinators the group identifies the young people they will work with. The young people are consulted on their feelings and needs and basic learning/achievement targets are set.

Workshops, the children attend weekly workshops, using a wide range of activities such as music, drama, and arts the children explore a range of issues including change, growth, emotions, anger management, communication skills all aimed at helping them to identify how they can cope with transitions. Workshops with the parents also take place in parallel in order to further support the young people once the programme has finished.

“I have noticed that I have to see far fewer children after lunch or during the day for bad behaviour”

Head teacher of a school that commissioned the group for Play and Behaviour workshops.

**COVO Connecting Voices
Established 1999
Key Figures**

Annual Income

2006 £146,000

2007 £115,584

2008 £121,207

Organisation

Staff 7

Volunteers 2

Beneficiaries 2500+

Presentation and Reflection, students present their “journey” to their teachers and parents, providing them with an opportunity to demonstrate how the programme has changed their attitudes towards themselves, their peers and their education.

Track Record and Results

COVO Connecting Voices have been working with children and young people with behavioural problems for ten years, working with over 2500 children last year across 5 London boroughs (Southwark, Lambeth, Lewisham, Hackney and Westminster). The group are currently being commissioned by the London Borough of Southwark to work with 24 supplementary schools on developing a self evaluation tool for the work they do with the mainstream schools and 2 other local authorities are engaging them to work in either nurseries or schools on the Play and Behaviour programme.

Risk and Reward

Although a very well established organisation this is the first application Capital Community Foundation has received from COVO Connecting Voices. The workshop leaders come from a wide variety of backgrounds including education, art therapy and community development and use their varied skills to engage the young people. Their approach is based on the work respected educators in the field of social development and emotional literacy, P. Freire and T. Makiguchi. Each programme includes a full evaluation examining the effectiveness of the intervention on the young people, their parents, their teachers and their peers.

Recommendations

COVO Connecting Voices are well respected in the field of behavioural management. Current funders include The Tudor Trust, London Borough of Southwark, London Borough of Hackney and BBC Children in Need.

A grant of £3,000 will enable them to work with 10 vulnerable children, at risk of exclusion, over a 14 week period to aid them with the transition to secondary school.