



## **The Brighton & Hove City Council Raising Aspirations Programme**

### **Research Report: Executive Summary**

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# Executive Summary

## Background and aims

Research points to the potential benefits of developing and supporting children's sense of motivation, self-efficacy, and confidence, and of raising their aspirations through family-based, school-based, and community-based activities. Brighton & Hove City Council commissioned three organisations to develop provisions for children and young people (aged 8 to 13 years) with the aim of improving personal aspirations in a sustainable way.

The *Shooting Stars* project, developed by Safety Net, involved 6-week small-group activity programmes designed to raise the aspirations of selected 8- to 11-year-old primary school children in three schools. The *Children Can Do* project, developed by People Can, offered a city-wide opportunity for community groups of 8- to 13-year-olds to be supported in planning their own projects and events, and submitting their funding applications for consideration by a panel of young people who had received relevant training in evaluation and decision-making. The *Evolve & Excel* project, developed by Spurgeons, trained adult volunteers to provide intensive one-to-one mentoring for selected 11- to 13-year-olds in Portslade.

The aims of this research investigation were:

- To assess the impact of the three strands of Raising Aspirations activity (Children Can Do, Spurgeons Evolve & Excel, and Shooting Stars), with a specific focus on the aspirations and well-being of the young people involved
- To illuminate the key processes involved in the three strands of activity and to identify specific characteristics and conditions that facilitated success of the programmes, as well as obstacles that hindered progress.

## Methodology

The research investigation involved four strands of activity:

- a) Collation and examination of quantitative and qualitative self-evaluation data provided by each organisation
  - Various project-specific rating scales completed by 81 young people in the Shooting Stars project, 18 young people in the Children Can Do project, and 12 young people in the Spurgeons project
  - Responses to open-ended evaluation questions posed to stakeholders (young people, parents/carers, school staff, volunteer mentors etc.) by each organisation
- b) Examination of a standard project monitoring questionnaire completed by the project leaders of each organisation, detailing the nature and impact of activities undertaken
- c) Use of a standard stakeholder questionnaire measure of enjoyment, engagement, and perceived changes experienced during involvement in the project
  - Completed by 144 respondents: 28 young people and 13 adults from Children Can Do, 13 young people and 20 adults from Spurgeons, and 55 young people and 15 adults from Shooting Stars
- d) Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 16 children and young people, and 17 parents, professional staff, or other adult stakeholders involved in the projects

## Key Findings

Quantitative analyses showed statistical evidence of positive attitudes towards all three projects, as well as indications of substantial positive changes over the period when young people were participating in the projects. Specifically, there were:

- statistically significant changes from baseline to endpoint on all five of the key ratings used by Shooting Stars, covering issues ranging from self-perceptions through to staying safe and working towards goals.
- statistically significant changes from baseline to endpoint on most of the key ratings used by Spurgeons Evolve & Excel, covering issues ranging from being healthy to community participation and confidence.
- consistently positive attitudes towards the work of Shooting Stars, Children Can Do, and Spurgeons Evolve & Excel, both among the children and young people and among the adult stakeholders (parents, school staff etc.).
- consistently reported positive changes (identified by both children and adults) as a result of taking part in Shooting Stars, Children Can Do, and Spurgeons Evolve & Excel
  - across all three projects, the highest degree of change was found in children's sense of confidence
- the detailed pattern of responses varied to some extent across the three projects, reflecting the great differences in their nature (e.g., involvement of parents, school-based vs. community-based activities, targeted recruitment vs. open invitation)

Qualitative analyses revealed a number of intertwined themes emerging across all three projects, despite the substantial differences in the nature of the activities that were undertaken. These were broadly consistent with the overall positive indications in the quantitative data.

- Increased confidence, evident in the willingness of young people to try new activities, and their increased tendency to participate in social/community interactions.
- Increased sense of responsibility, including improvements in young people's perceptions of autonomy, self-efficacy, and ability to chart their own course
- A more positive outlook both for the present and the future, both in terms of setting, working towards, and achieving goals, and in terms of an enhanced expectation of what could be achieved in the future
- A sense of being respected and valued by others, based on young people's feelings that they were being listened to, that they were important, and that others were there to support them.

Overall, there was very clear evidence that all three projects had succeeded in the basic aim of raising the aspirations of children and young people. Analysis of the qualitative data also revealed a number of facilitating factors that supported the success of the projects, most notably the buy-in from, and communication between, stakeholders in family, school, and community contexts. Difficulties in ensuring such buy-in and communication sometimes emerged in various project-specific issues, such as challenges in recruitment or in the practical coordination of project activities. In addition, a broad theme emerged with regard to the need for greater sustainability of the work over a longer period of time. Related to this, our interactions with stakeholders flagged the importance of central support from Brighton & Hove City Council itself in publicising and disseminating the work of the organisations, as well as in fostering positive partnerships between different projects.

## Recommendations

1. Continue to support a variety of projects operating in different ways (e.g., mentoring, small-group activities, and community work) and in different contexts (e.g., school, family, community) to raise the aspirations of children and young people.
2. Invest in community facilities appropriate for 8- to 13-year-olds in the city, in order to enhance work of this kind and provide increased opportunities for children and young people to easily access a varied range of social, cultural, artistic, sporting, and other activities.
3. Establish, support, and maintain a highly visible partnership network of voluntary sector providers who can help to meet the needs of children and young people in the city through different strands of work.
4. Engage with researchers working in this area to identify a solid evidence base for the short-term and long-term effects of different strands of activity that can potentially help to raise the aspirations of children and young people in a sustainable way.
5. Ensure that robust evaluation is built in from the outset of Council-funded projects and that there are appropriate avenues for publicising and disseminating the work to a wide audience.