

Case Study – Developing Community Resilience through Schools

Background

Essex County Council's Developing Community Resilience through Schools project held a pilot to test the products they have produced. The project was launched in conjunction with Exercise Watermark and Cabinet Office's Community Resilience program on Monday 7th March 2011.

Summary

The project was achieved by working with 10 schools over a period of 3 weeks; teaching over 2000 children aged 6 -11 about risks in their community through fun activities spread across the curriculum including role play. Past experience has proved that teaching needs to be made exciting and engaging through a variety of activities: for example grandparents have been brought into school to share experiences of 1953 floods, external trips (sailing, visiting flood barrier etc), poetry, music, dance, games, reading, as well as having individual work task packs. Produces include smart board interaction using the specially developed story books and interactive games, website activities, getting the children involved in problem solving etc. Children were also taught media interview skills by BBC Essex and had their own 10min daily slot on the channel.

Thanks to a school celebration event, with presentations from the children to their parents, the project had a secondary educational effect on the wider community. Knowledge diminishes over time but school learning was reinforced through summative presentations created by the children after their 3 weeks resilience teaching, and later in life through public warning/informing campaigns. Within the project DVDs and Books were produced for the children and characters created so that they the "What if" campaign has an identified brand. Other age specific activities have taken place with teenagers, such as role play. The "What if" campaign targets primary schools, using the products produced and having engagement with all Cat1 Responders. This has enhanced understanding of how the response agencies come together to support the community and the youngster role in understanding this and sharing the messages.

Who was involved?

- **Essex County Council** (Rosanna Briggs - Deputy Head of Service, Deputy County EPO)
- **Working Group** - CC members and Cat 1 responders - implemented the project
- **Project Board** (senior representative from the Cabinet Office, Department for Education and local 'Beacon' authorities)
- **Focus Groups** (school, emergency planning and children's services staff)
- **Canvey Island and other local schools**
- **Parents/grandparents** - attended the project celebration event and helped children throughout.
- **Community Leaders** - some were invited into schools to share experience of past floods
- **Media and local businesses, local politicians including MP and County Councillors**

What were the Outcomes?

- Feedback from head-teachers and local authorities indicated that they found the project's teaching and resources very useful. The community is now better informed, independent and empowered in the face of an emergency.
- Teachers noted that parents were far more involved in helping children with homework than usual – very rewarding that parent took such an interest.
- The BBC Essex - pupils broadcast each day created a huge sense of pride in schools, pupils, parents and the wider community. This reinforced the aim of the project: to make children and their communities feel more involved in Community Resilience.
- The questionnaire completed by pupils in the last pilot showed that: 59% involved their families in the project, 96% knew what a 'Grab-Bag' was and how to make one, 79% enjoyed the online 'Ben and Molly' emergency learning games and 64% have made a fire escape plan for their own homes.

Key Learning Points

- **Raised children's awareness** of emergency preparedness (also leads to secondary education effect on whole community).

- The children's **learning about resilience was reinforced** through presentations given by the children to their parents at a celebration event.
- Good example of **varied trialling methods** to ensure resources fit for purpose (trailing through consultation group and Canvey Island pilot).
- **Questionnaire** of pupils after project also essential – highlighted success of project, but also identified areas that could be improved in future projects.
- Communication barriers with teachers lead to some misunderstandings about who was delivering the Emergency planning lessons to the children and how.
- Some teachers were worried that teaching Emergency Resilience would demand more of their responsibilities and curriculum - the Essex team learnt to introduce the project to schools as part of the existing curriculum, rather than as an additional task to teachers. The project was then received very favourably and testimonials from teachers have confirmed this.

Next Steps

- 3 pilot projects have been carried out, and the learning from each scheme continues to inform and change future plans and has developed teacher toolkits rather than relying on Cat 1 delivery
- An 'E-folio' site being created: children can continue the project at home, and also access teaching documents/homework when their school is closed in severe weather.
- Audio-based learning is being developed to enable children with disabilities and/or impaired sight to become more involved in future projects. Additionally an App is also being developed for iphones.
- The Essex team don't have the resources to carry out all the teaching and activities in every school, and therefore the latest pilots have focussed more on teacher-delivery and web-based learning.
- www.schoolemergencies.info (project websites)
- www.whatif-guidance.org (has been developed since the end of the project by Essex)
- Article written for EPS 'Resilience' magazine (Feb 2011)
- Presentations given at EPS (Welsh branch) conference, Capita 'warning and informing the public' conference, Westminster Briefing May 2011, London Fire Brigade Olympic Community Resilience June 2011, CCS Sponsored Award at EPS Conference 2011

- Communicating with the Public Course – Emergency Planning College – Essex
Approach to School Education

Further information

Development of community cohesion is an essential part of the curricular by schools. This pilot with Canvey island gave Teachers who may have been unsure about teaching it due to their lack of expertise, an insight how the educational resources provided by the Essex would take pressure off schools and allow them to focus on practical actions they can take in Community Resilience but still being able to use the curriculum to achieve this.

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