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People power: Norfolk Coalition of Disabled People

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Brief description

The Norfolk Coalition of Disabled People (NCODP) is a human rights organisation which supports disabled people in the county. NCODP provides a wide range of services including: advice, support to adults and juveniles detained in police custody and a disability rights service. The Young Disabled People's Forum (YDPF) is a specialist service for young people which promotes their self-direction and self-determination. This is one of seven case studies which forms part of Ofsted's survey, '[Critical issues in the provision of youth work for young disabled people](#)', published in January 2013.

Overview – the provider's message

'The YDPF was set up for two main reasons. The first was to provide a group for young disabled people in Norfolk based on the social model of disability. The second was to create a new generation of leaders for the Norfolk Coalition of Disabled People (NCODP). All the provision in Norfolk for young disabled people, both state and voluntary sector, was (and still is) based on the medical, charity and activity based models of disability. The YDPF offers an alternative model which promotes young disabled people's self-direction and self-determination. In our view, the former leads to low self-esteem, developmental delay and dependency, and the latter to empowered and independent young people.

YDPF is a safe place to meet others, to socialise and to try out new ideas. It is a place where young people can explore issues around disability in a context of the social model and human rights. It engages a wide number of young disabled people, and offers a meeting space and support from social action facilitators. The young people set their own agenda and priorities. The YDPF challenges them to "live in the world". It is led by its members so that they have the opportunity to make decisions about what should happen during the sessions. They learn and practise new skills through making decisions and taking responsibility for managing the work of the group.'

Mark Harrison, Chief Executive

The good practice in detail

YDPF was formed in 1996. The coalition board, all of whom are disabled people, is elected by members from the membership. The young people involved have a keen interest in representation and social action. Many of its members are immersed in community issues. In their words, the forum involves 'lots of different things: campaigning; filming; setting up events and having a say'.



Among other projects, the forum produced a film 'Don't Dis me, I'm able'. With 'help from a few friends', the film describes the journey that well-known disabled people, including MPs, sports people, radio presenters and actors, have undertaken and the experiences they encountered over the years. The blind BBC reporter Peter White talks about 'needing to get rather pushy in

forwarding his career'. Forum members conducted the interviews in an engaging and entertaining manner; its messages are strong and exemplify its ethos well.

The backbone of this project is political and social action. In the words of the members, the curriculum is about:

- discarding stereotypes in favour of equality and equal opportunity
- inclusion: no-one should be left out or excluded. That's how it should be!
- killing off discrimination: what we have to do to make sure no-one faces bad attitudes
- being empowered: it's about being in control of our lives, saying what we want to say and making our own decisions
- fighting for our rights: we should have the same opportunities as everyone else
- building confidence: it's necessary to speak out, have our say.

The group is therefore focused firmly on empowerment and self-determination. Much of the publicity material tells their story, unfettered by workers. Young people state that 'it's led by its members, which is true independence. It's a safe place to meet and socialise and there are no rights or wrongs'.

Visitors are left impressed by the forthright nature of the project. Young people and their workers observe that at times other organisations seek to 'wish the disability problem away'. An example of this was a charity transporting young disabled people to a night club in a minibus with disability logos on the side. This may be acceptable for many people, but a measure of the challenge and of the forum's success is to enable young people to attend such activities in an entirely self-determined and independent manner.

Peer support is first-class, with members applying and sharing their many skills in areas such as social networking, writing, arts, lobbying and campaigning.

A successful bid to the [Big Lottery Fund](#) means that the Youth Forum can grow and develop over the next



three years; supporting far greater numbers of young disabled people and reaching further across Norfolk. The project will also include a Leadership Programme for some of the Youth Forum Members, developing their skills and experience for the future.

Provider background

The YDPF is for young disabled people aged between 14 and 25 and meets fortnightly. Based in Norwich city centre, the project gives young people easy and independent access to shops and cafés, and facilitates their use of public transport.

Other examples in this series

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Birmingham City Council
Kent County Council
Merseyside Youth Association
Rochdale Youth Service
Whizz-Kidz

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