

This good practice example was archived in December 2016 as it is over three years old.

Befriending and buddying for young disabled people: Kent County Council

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Brief description

This example explains how Kent County Council Youth Service works in partnership with Voluntary Action within Kent (VAWK) to provide highly effective 'buddying' and mentoring opportunities between non-disabled and disabled young people. 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

'Befriending is a fantastic way to engage your local community in a positive activity that has mutual benefits. Volunteer mentoring and befriending offers personalised and individual one-to-one support to enable children and young people to overcome barriers to participation. Through timely non-judgemental encouragement, befriendees are supported to develop coping strategies, building confidence and resilience. The volunteer also benefits enormously through the opportunity to gain valuable work readiness and to develop leadership and life skills. Volunteers act as positive role models, attending clubs and activities with the befriendees. Many go on to careers in social care, where their dedication inspires others to volunteer, creating a supportive community who are empathic and attuned to the needs of others. The family, school and peers of the befriendees notice positive changes, such as improved social relationships and higher attainment.'



Tony Waite, Children and Young People's Manager, VAWK

The good practice in detail

Kent County Council's Integrated Youth Service works in close and effective partnership with Voluntary Action within Kent (VAWK) to provide a valuable befriending and buddying scheme to support young disabled people. The scheme, 'Be Our Buddy' (BOB), recruits volunteers to work with young people with mild disabilities or a social communication issue. The aim is to help the befriended to overcome real and perceived barriers and enable them to access mainstream activities they are interested in. These young people, aged between eight and 18, often miss out on extra-curricular social activities.

This scheme has helped young disabled individuals develop greater confidence, eventually making the transition from targeted or specialist youth settings specifically for young disabled people to integrated 'open access' settings. It challenges non-disabled young people about their preconceptions of young disabled people and provides progression routes to training programmes that can lead to nationally recognised qualifications.



Buddies help young disabled people to access the mainstream activities they are interested in, such as sporting activities, Brownies, Cub Scouts, dance, art and drama classes. There is a strong focus on buddies building positive relationships which are planned to last between six and 12 months depending upon the needs of the young person. Special attention is given to empowering the young person to attend social activities on their own, reducing their social isolation and improving their confidence. An example of how effective this support can be is seen through [Laura's poem](#).

Setting up a buddy

- The BOB coordinator visits young disabled people and their family at home to assess their individual needs and get a clear picture of the mainstream activities they would like to access.
- VAWK then recruits carefully selected volunteers as buddies and matches their strengths to the needs and interests of the young disabled people.
- Volunteers receive training and supervision to make sure the arrangements remain effective and rewarding for both parties.

Buddies can make a real difference to the life of a young person, who may just need a helping hand from someone who is interested in them. Together they can share new experiences and have fun too.



At 12 years of age Oscar was referred to BOB by his social worker because of concerns relating to his parents' separation. The problems at home were affecting Oscar's siblings too and soon their behaviour, particularly aggressive outbursts, required intervention. Oscar felt very self-conscious as he was insecure and concerned about what others thought about him. He was prone to panic attacks and feeling low. He tended to internalise his feelings and that resulted in him self-harming.

He was matched with Peter (26 years old) who had attended the same school as Oscar. Peter had insight and experience of what Oscar and his siblings were going through. He and Oscar met weekly after school for about eight months, cooking and sharing a meal. Peter was a positive role model, demonstrating that there is no need to be physically aggressive or intimidating to get noticed or be a success. Peter was a consistent presence for Oscar, someone who listened to him and did not judge him. He was also someone Oscar could offload to without provoking an extreme response. At one point Oscar had been excluded for being rude to a teacher and Peter helped him to express his remorse and accept the consequences of his behaviour.

The buddy scheme has been highly effective in supporting Oscar through a difficult time. Many people who know him have seen how he benefited from the buddying relationship with Peter. He started the new term at school with greater confidence and in a better frame of mind to manage his personal relationships more effectively. He now has a clear focus for his career and this has promoted greater maturity and concentration at school.

Provider background

[Voluntary Action Within Kent](#) (VAWK) has an established partnership with [Kent County Council](#) Integrated Youth Services. It delivers a range of services to individuals, voluntary and community organisations, and private and public sector agencies. VAWK aims to empower the most disadvantaged people and those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.

[Be Our Buddy](#) matches trained volunteer befrienders with children and young people who have a mild to moderate disability. Befrienders act as peer mentors and facilitate young people building the confidence and social skills the need to access local community services and activities independently.

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