

High View School Plymouth



Objectives of Case Study

Five case studies have been commissioned by the South West Councils to showcase effective community engagement at neighbourhood level. The objective of all five studies is to highlight excellent partnership working with communities and other service providers, to identify common problems and find solutions through effective engagement and commitment to resolve local issues.

To empower communities to develop and deliver change in their own neighbourhoods.

Background to project

Efford is a suburb located approximately three miles from the centre of Plymouth.

The area was divided into higher and lower Efford with little cohesion between the communities. Each community had its own school, Plym View and Highfield. Although close together geographically, the schools ran independently of each other and there was little interaction.

In the past the community has had problems with high drug and alcohol dependency, high crime rates, high unemployment, poor health, poor standard of housing and little access to adult education. It was the 5th most deprived area of Plymouth.

Efford has an active community partnership (Heart of Efford Community Partnership) who have worked hard to engage with local residents, create a sense of community and make Efford a better place to live.

Efford has been selected as one of the key regeneration neighbourhoods within Plymouth. The Efford Building Communities Initiative, is a regeneration pilot programme, funded by South West Regional Development Agency, and is being delivered through Plymouth City Council's (PCC) Neighbourhood Regeneration Team in partnership with The Heart of Efford Community Partnership.

The Heart of Efford Community Partnership

The Heart of Efford Community Partnership was established by local residents about 12 years ago.

The partnership's aim is to further the interests and improve the quality of life for people who live or work in Efford. Their work includes promoting and implementing local initiatives and being the lead body for consultations on the Efford Building Communities initiative and local regeneration issues. They also listen to, consult and share information with everyone in the Efford Neighbourhood. In short, the Heart of Efford is the focus for community life in the area.

The group was able to secure funding from the South West Regional Development Agency, mainly for the regeneration of Torridge Way, which runs through the centre of Efford. They started the project by putting in place some quick wins to gain the confidence of residents e.g. the installing gates in some of the flats to limit access to the courtyard area to residents.

There were plans to create new facilities for the area such as a new church building, library and a new school. However the partnership realised that they needed to look at the bigger picture and rather than just change buildings, they needed to change the mindset of the community and create cohesion and a "can do" culture where residents felt empowered to make things happen.

The Schools

The community was served by two primary schools; Plym View and Highfield.

Both schools were achieving but had a falling roll so there was a strong case for having one new school which would serve the whole community. However, this would mean that parents no longer had a choice of school and it was identified at an early stage that this could be a barrier to getting the community onside. Head Teacher Kim Dorian-Kemp explained that the need to be proactive in getting the community on board was identified early on as one of the key challenges for the project.

The Challenge

The key challenges facing the new school were to engage the community, getting parents and children bought into the idea of having one single school in Efford. An additional aim was to create cohesion between the residents of upper and lower Efford.

While the schools were achieving good results in providing the children with an education, they were less able to affect other issues that affect the children's lives e.g. family. High percentage of hard to reach parents.

Both schools had previously applied to Creative Partnership's Change Schools Programme which works with the school over a 3 year period to develop the creative learning environment. Change schools work with artists and creative professionals on a range of projects to involve pupils and explore their creative potential. This also provides the opportunity for the wider community, including parents and family members to become involved in the work of the school.

The Change Schools programme therefore offered an ideal opportunity to engage with pupils, parents and the wider community.

To rise to the challenge of creating true community spirit in Efford there would have to be effective partnership working between the pupils and staff of the school, local residents, the Heart of Efford Community Partnership and Creative Partnerships.

The Role of Creative Partnerships

Creative Partnerships is funded by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. It is a 3 year programme, which is now in its third year in Efford. The school links with a Creative Partner, in this case Ed Whitelaw who works with the pupils and school to support them through the programme.

The Creative Partnerships programme brings creative workers such as artists, architects and scientists into schools to work with teachers to inspire young people and help them learn. It also seeks to develop the wider involvement of the community with the work of the school including involving parents and families.

Creative Partnerships are working with the school in three key areas:

The Design Pod – where pupils work with the architect and builders on the design, materials and colour scheme of the new school.

Crazy Glue – creating a link with pupils, parents and the wider community through involvement in art projects

Creative Curriculum – developing the skills of pupils and teachers in using digital technology



Design Pod

The Design Pod are responsible for the design of the new school including materials used and colour schemes.

Members of the Design Pod were selected from each class by their peers and teachers who tried to identify those children who would come up with ideas and who were prepared to speak their mind. The group was formed from one pupil from each year group in each school, 18 children in total.

These pupils had the chance to meet with the builders and put forward their ideas. They went on visits to other schools to see what they had done and find out what had worked well and what had not. As a result of the visits, the pupils could identify anything they felt needed to be changed in the new High View School and then had to make a case to ask for this to be done.



For example, on one of their visits the group identified a problem with the flooring which was going to be used through conversations with pupils from the school they were visiting. When they returned to Efford, they then had to put forward a case for changing the flooring to something more suitable. They made their case successfully and the flooring was changed to something more suited to their needs.

The Design Pod try to get together at least every 2 months and still visit the school to see how the building is progressing.

As part of this process, the pupils developed their skills and confidence and are now involved in other projects in the community such as a recent project to improve green space in Efford.

The Heart of Efford Community Partnership were successful in their bid for funding for improving parks in the area. The partnership organised a community consultation in the library to get the views of the wider community on issues such as where best to place the multi use games area. The information was also brought to the school to get the children's views and then an open day was held at the park where residents used a sticker system to vote on their favourite from 3 designs.

This process was a great success as everyone felt involved and it created a sense of ownership in the community.

The Design Pod children were the most involved in helping with this process. They also get involved in other community consultations and are considered young ambassadors in the community. This has also helped to change the way adults view young people in the area as residents are now used to seeing them in a positive light.

In January 2011 the Design Pod will be taking parents, children and interested parties from the community to the new school for a look around before it opens on the 28 February 2011.

As well as input from the Design Pod, the builders are constantly reminded of the children's involvement. All the children took part in a Health and Safety competition for the new school and the winning entries have been posted around the site for the builders to see as they work.

Head teacher Kim Dorian-Kemp said "Engagement with children is often just lip service whereas this is a genuine child based project with the children having a real say in their new school. They have even chosen the colour scheme for my new office – bright pink and lime green!"

Crazy Glue

Another aspect of the Change School programme has been the setting up of Crazy Glue which looks at how links can be forged between the children from both schools and the community as a whole.

One key issue which was identified was the need to engage with hard to reach parents and using creative art was seen as a non-threatening way of doing this.

Initially a core group of 5 children and their parents went on a residential trip to start and help expand the process. A Community Arts Group has now been set up as a result of the process with a core group of parent ambassadors supporting the work.

Crazy Glue looked at the work done by other projects and including a visit to Hareclive Primary School, Bristol where they looked at a scheme where pupils and parents run room 13 an art and design film studio. They identified this as something they would like to introduce in their school.

Initially a lot of work had to be done to build people's confidence and to help them develop their skills. Pupils learned about photography, making and editing films, and some have also attended workshops on art and regeneration, performance arts and radio broadcasting. Parents were also involved and took the opportunity to gain skills alongside their children.



Crazy Glue were also supported by the Take A Part Programme, a two-year arts in the public realm project for Efford which is led by Kim Wide.

The project seeks to develop community cohesion amongst the residents of Efford from the start, using artists to reach the community through the arts. The programme is looking at a number of strands for improving Efford including young people, health, green spaces and physical improvements.

Examples of work Crazy Glue have been involved in include:

Something for the Weekend, a sculpture project where the group made a life size hippo from cob. The hippo is outside the Highfield school building and will be left behind when High View relocates to its new home to mark the year that the new school was opened.

Efford FM, a one day community broadcast for Efford, by Efford. This broadcast took place on 25 July 2010 from Efford Youth Centre and included footage from wild food walks, ukelele marathons, sound scapes, explorations, song requests and dedications, on-the-spot interviews, a radio play, pause button portraits and community service announcements. Residents were invited to listen together in a community barbeque.

Ambulation Exhibition at Plymouth Arts Centre an exhibition, series of events and films about walking. Crazy Glue have put together an audio walk which will be included in the exhibition alongside the work of established artists.

Kim Wide explained that the work of Crazy Glue has encouraged the parents and children involved to step out of their comfort zone and learn new skills. It has given people the aspiration to achieve, so often missing in our communities and has enabled them to improve their local environment through their art.

The project has also achieved its aim in helping to reach some of the parents who were not engaging in the school. Teaching Assistant Gemma Ward who is heavily involved in the programme explained that some of the families involved had little opportunity to do activities together. Although they had creative skills, these were often not recognised and were not being developed. Initially some of the parents were unsure of what to expect and needed encouragement to get involved but they have enjoyed working on projects with their children and for the benefit of the community.

Children and parents alike are now keen to get involved in new projects and pupils who have now gone on to secondary school are coming back to join in with Crazy Glue activities.

Creative Curriculum

This initiative looks at the creative use of IT and digital media and how it can be used to provide services and create income. This has resulted in Magic Hours Studios, a social enterprise based in the school where the pupils take on creative film projects.

The studios are child led and adult supported with film maker Hana Backland supporting and facilitating the children through the process of creating a story board, filming and editing. Teachers are also trained so that they are comfortable with the equipment and can support the pupils where necessary.

The pupils have already won two Frankie awards (the Plymouth answer to Oscars, named after Sir Francis Drake) with 6 and 7 year old pupils winning the Best Environmental Film award in 2008 and 10 and 11 year old pupils winning the best advertising/promotional film category in 2009.

Key Achievements

Head Teacher Kim Dorian-Kemp said:

“Efford has always had a big heart but lacked cohesion. As a result of this initiative the area has improved physically and now looks better, socially with there being much more going on and the community are now more skilled. We have built people’s skills and aspirations and broken the cycle of economic deprivation”.

The Chair of the Efford Community Partnership added:

“People now believe in themselves. They have been given belief and confidence. The “can do” culture of the school has permeated into the community and improved community spirit. Efford in a great community to live and work in.”

Hints and Tips for the Team

- Start small with an enthusiastic group
- Find people who are proactive
- Get involved, don’t sit back
- Listen carefully
- Deliver on your promises
- Seek external funding
- COMMUNICATE
- Use art as a novel media
 - it is non threatening and creates a common language to bring the community together
 - art creates something tangible and nice to look at and gives people a sense of pride
 - art bridges gaps between generations and communities
 - it creates opportunities for people to step out of their comfort zone and to achieve something they did not know was possible.



Conclusion

This project came about due to the need to amalgamate two schools but ended up achieving so much more. The school and Heart of Efford seized the opportunity to create community cohesion and build a common bond between two quite separate communities.

With help from their partners Creative Partnerships and Efford Take A Part and using art as a medium to bring people together, the team have not only brought the communities together, but also brought new skills to the community and created a greater sense of pride and belonging.

The people of Efford have been given the opportunity to learn new skills and build their self-confidence. In doing so they have used their art to create a more attractive physical environment which local people can be proud of and take ownership of. The local children are very much part of the work going on in the community and bridges have been built between generations. So much so that in their report Ofsted described the pupils as “the lynch pin of the community”.

The work that has been done here demonstrates how people with a “can do” attitude can really make a difference.

The Big Society

The new UK Government is placing considerable emphasis on “The Big Society” which aims to give citizens, communities and local government the power and information they need to come together, solve the problems they face and build the community they want to live in. Through giving communities more power and responsibility the government seeks to achieve fairness and opportunity for all.

The capacity building which has been going on in Efford as part of this project has put the community in an excellence position to take advantage of any opportunities offered by The Big Society agenda.

What the Project Means to the Community

Kim Dorian-Kemp has a poem on her office wall which for her sums up the message her team have given the community of Efford through this initiative.

Dream Big, Author Unknown

If there were ever a time to dare,
To make a difference
To embark on something worth doing
It is now.
Not for any grand cause, necessarily –
But for something that tugs at your heart
Something that is worth your aspiration
Something that is your dream.
You owe it to yourself
To make your days count.
Have fun. Dig deep. Stretch.
Dream big.
Know, though,
That things worth doing
Seldom come easy.
There will be times when you want to
Turn around
Pack it up and call it quits.
Those times tell you
That you are pushing yourself
And that you are not afraid to learn by trying.
Persist.
Because with an idea,
Determination and the right tools,
You can do great things.
Let your instincts, your intellect
And let your heart guide you.
Trust.
Believe in the incredible power
Of the human mind
Of doing something that makes a difference.
Of working hard
Of laughing and hoping
Of lasting friends
Of all the things that will cross your path.
Next year
The start of something new
Brings the hope of something great.
Anything is possible.
There is only one you
And you will pass this way but once.
Do it right.

Further Information

Heart of Efford Community Partnership

www.hecp.org.uk

Creative Partnerships

www.creative-partnerships.com

Efford Take A Part

www.effordtakeapart.org.uk

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