

Cardiff Young People First – Sex and Relationships Project “All the Juicy Bits!”



Info.

Cardiff People First is led by people with a learning disability. We support each other make our voices heard, learn about life and do new things. We fight for equality, understanding, respect and acceptance.

History of this project.

Cardiff People First was set up by Ely residents in the early 1990's. As the organisation developed it wanted to enable more people to have a voice especially people from black and ethnic minority communities and young people.

In 2004 Cardiff People First set up a self advocacy group for under 25 year olds with learning disabilities in their schools and colleges. The young people decided the issue they were most interested in, and affected by was sex and relationships.

The young people wanted to know more about sex and relationships and had lots of questions to ask. Cardiff Young People First put on a Sex, Sexuality and Relationships Conference in June 2005.

The conference was very well attended and well received. We learnt a lot from organising the conference, most tellingly that some organisations in the South Wales region didn't want to give sexual health information directly to young people with a learning disability. The reasons they gave were:

- They didn't want to 'encourage these young people to have sex'.
- They didn't have the money to give accessible information to people with a learning disability.
- Their staff were not trained to talk to people with a learning disability.

Those who wanted to help us didn't have enough staff to spare. We had support from Eryl Powell of the NHS Young People's Sexual Health

Task group whom acknowledged that this was an issue that urgently needed to be addressed.

The following year Cardiff Young People First raised the issue again at an AM meeting at the Welsh Assembly. We made sure it was included in the Equal Opportunities Commission report “Why are disabled young people always left till last?” This was the result of three years work as part of a reference group for the Welsh Assembly.

We thought it was best to start by training sexual health nurses that work in clinics.

Before the young people could train sexual health nurses they needed to have a better understanding and be comfortable speaking about sex.

In 2006 the Senior Health Promotion Specialist Cheryl Joscelyne introduced us to Simon Evans and Caroline Ryan from the c-card scheme. Simon and Caroline, youth workers from Cardiff YMCA came to deliver sexual health information to the young people.

We quickly realised that it wasn't just sexual health education the young people needed. We really had to go back to the basics answering questions like ‘How can you tell if someone likes you?’, ‘What do you do if your boyfriend starts kissing someone else’. These types of questions many young non-disabled people chat about with their peers, but we found our young people had never talked through these dilemmas before, perhaps because of having less freedom and a more sheltered upbringing. Some were not ready to tackle these issues until they were in their twenties.

We realised how important it was for young people who are vulnerable to be educated about sex and be empowered, but also to keep themselves safe. We spent a long time talking about consent, rape, appropriate touching and answering questions like, “Is it ok for your uncle to kiss you?”

We found there was a lack of counselling and emotional support services for young people with learning disabilities. They didn't know where to turn if they were confused and upset.

The course was supposed to last for 8 weeks but it soon became apparent that this wasn't enough time. By the end of the 8 weeks Simon and Caroline had only touched on sexual health, as we spent the time designing a course together which discussed relationships, appropriate behaviour and safety issues. We therefore agreed for them to return in the summer of 2008 and 2009 to finish the project.

Simon and Caroline worked hard to make the relationships and sexual health training accessible for the young people. Cardiff Young People First taught Simon and Caroline how to make information accessible. They worked so well together they decided to create a booklet and for the young people to train other young people with learning disabilities about sexual health.

After many years hard work the booklet "All the Juicy Bits" was developed. The young people also trained as Peer Mentors and developed Sex and Relationships training for other young people with learning disabilities. Finally in Feb 2010 the young people began delivering (by themselves) their accessible sexual health training to sexual health nurses.

