

Integrating



Children & Young People

EVALUATION

Introduction

This is a summary of an evaluation of Integrating Children and Young People (referred to simply as *Integrating*) which has been funded by the Big Lottery's Awards For All fund. The aims of the evaluation were to: better understand the impacts of the work on young people, parents and the wider community; and contribute to the sustainability of the organisation through providing an evidence base for their work. The evaluation was carried out by an independent sector specialist, Barefoot Research and Evaluation, between September and December, 2015.

The broad objective of *Integrating* is to ensure the inclusion of disabled children and young people in everyday life. *Integrating* is an activity based organisation that uses Support Workers to enable children and young people to engage in group-based activities in the community, six days a week. They also provide residential activities, such as trips to Euro Disney and Butlins. *Integrating* works with approximately 90 individual children and young people each year. To provide a context, there are approximately 1000 disabled children and young people registered in County Durham.

Findings

During the evaluation we found that different priorities were expressed about the impacts and benefits of *Integrating* by children and young people, and their parents and carers: for the former the priorities were the opportunities the activities afforded to enable them to engage in play and have fun, and the social bonds which were created therein; for parents and carers the priorities were expressed as the developmental impacts of *Integrating*, enabling their children to become more independent, as well as the benefits related to increasing their children's social networks.



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I like the friends I have made and the feelings I get from coming here.” Young person

FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, we found the impacts of *Integrating* included:

- **Increasing social skills and networks:** these were achieved by providing the opportunity to engage with their peers, without the influence of parents, whilst being involved in fun activities in a universal setting. In so doing, it allowed children to increase their social skills and develop new friendships and social linkages. The children and young people were aware that the friendships and experiences gained during *Integrating* activities had fundamental and positive consequences on themselves and their lives.
- **Improving and maintaining emotional and mental wellbeing:** children and young people recognised that being involved in *Integrating* activities made them feel better about themselves, a major effect of increased social

networks and increased social intelligence. This was reported to improve relationships between children and parents/carers, providing a normalised experience for both parties. In addition, engagement with *Integrating* over a long period of time, as was the case with many of the young people, was found to create emotional strength and stability.

FOR PARENTS AND CARERS, the impacts of *Integrating* were found to be:

- **Skill development and progression:** parents and carers reported that their children had shown significant development in particular areas of their lives which they attributed directly to the involvement in *Integrating*. Parents and carers said that these developments could be separated from those associated with an increase in age. They also said that *Integrating* had had success in creating these changes where others had failed, including their own efforts and those of their schools.
- **Positive impacts for all family members:** parents and carers reported that as a result of their child(ren)'s participation with *Integrating*, benefits were felt across the entire family. This happens in a variety of ways, from the changes in behaviour in the child or young person improving dynamics and/or habits within the family, to the time spent away at activities enabling focused attention on other children in the family.
- **A high quality and well delivered service:** parents and carers reported high rates of satisfaction with the service on all levels, including the quality of activities, the nurturing environment created by the staff and the safety created by the organisation for the children and young people. The children and young people held staff in high regard and afforded to them respect and authority. As a result of this, they behaved in a different way with them than they did with their parents. This meant they did different things and interacted in a different way with one another: children and young people did more things for themselves, acted in a more independent, responsible and less childlike way and were more likely to take instructions. As a



result of the children's behaviour, the quality of the activities and the experience and standard of staff, parents and carers had complete confidence and trust in the organisation.

- **Noticeable improvements in delivery:** parents and carers reported that they had noted a significant change in how the service was delivered which happened around 2012, when the new model of working was introduced. They reported that the service had become more dynamic, engaging and enjoyable for the children and young people, with more age appropriate activities and events. One parent said that they had stopped coming previously as they had lost interest, however they had returned as they had heard from friends good things about *Integrating* and now remain with the service.

There were series of other findings, which included:

- **High levels of commitment from staff and volunteers:** passion, commitment and investment were words that were often used to describe the Support Workers and volunteers, who were reported by the parents and the Board members to be responsible for much of the effectiveness of the organisation. The Support Workers reported that their commitment was due to the relationships that were formed between themselves and the young people; it was these that created the bond and loyalty. Development and progression also played a role in the relationship through the Support Workers being able to witness developmental change in the children and young people.
- **Staff feel confident and supported in their roles:** there was confidence expressed by the Support Workers and Team Leaders about their ability to carry out the work. This was due to a number of factors: sufficient and appropriate training and the ability to access specialised training when needed; accessible senior staff for support and advice; peer support systems in place; and good communication. Recently, the Chair has been assisting with the operational side of the organisation and this has been valued by staff.
- **A unique service model:** this allows them to provide a consistent and equal service to a child or young person with any level of intellectual or physical difficulty. *Integrating's* Support Workers can work at any ratio from 1:1, 1:2 or higher which means that regardless

Parents said ...

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Integrating has not just made a difference, it is the reason we are able to be a family. The activities that my child does enables him to have a social life, friends, interests and something worth talking about. The experiences he gains in activities are so important to his mental health and wellbeing. Not just to him but to the whole family as we know he is having fun and not socially isolated and depressed ...

Charlie has grown into a happy, confident young man who has made lots of lifelong friends [at Integrating] ...

We have seen a notable difference since our son started participating, to quote him "it makes me feel better inside" ...

of the level of impairment, children are able to participate in group activities. The service model is administered and arranged using resource-light but communication-rich social media with a young electronic media skilled workforce. This means that activities can be organised quickly, without the need for face-to-face or paper-based communications and with minimal resource implications.



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The young people are learning community etiquette.”

Operations Coordinator

- **A respected organisation:** both commissioners and partner organisations had high levels of confidence about the quality of delivery and the capability of the organisation. Durham County Council valued the work of *Integrating* for reasons that included: the positive feedback they received from parents and carers forums; their openness and responsiveness; and the added value they provide. Sage Gateshead, a partner organisation, spoke very highly of the commitment, enthusiasm and professionalism of *Integrating*.
- **Working for disability rights:** the delivery method of *Integrating* leads to the improvement of the profile of disabled people in the local community. Because activities take place within the universality of local venues and communities, it increases familiarity between non-disabled and disabled people and leads to understanding and respect. Parents and carers were struck by the ‘normality’ of the approach taken, which did not segregate or focus on disability. Members of the public and staff at the venues where the activities take place view the groups as siblings or friends, opposed to Support Worker/disabled person. This contributes to the broader aim of normalising disability in general public life and truly integrating children and young people.

Conclusion

We have found Integrating Children and Young People to be an effective and highly valued disabled children’s and young people’s voluntary sector organisation. They have a highly motivated and committed Board of Trustees who have led the organisation through a transformation which has ensured its survival and developmental growth, to the point where they are now a commissioned local authority provider. Their delivery model is effective and engaging, made up of a young staff contingent and administered using new technologies. Their approach enables a universal provision of service to all children, regardless of the level of impairment, which emphasises the integrating nature of the organisation, as nothing special or segregated is applied to different children. Indeed, *Integrating* addresses cultural and structural barriers to disabled children and young people in County Durham, working towards a more inclusive community. They do this as their name suggests by integrating their service users into mainstream activities, avoiding segregated activities and involving them in decisions. There is no doubt that Durham and Chester le Street are fortunate to have *Integrating* delivering their area.

For more information on Integrating or to see a copy of the full evaluation, contact:

Integrating Children and Young People
Bullion Hall
South Approach
Chester le Street
Co. Durham
DH2 2DW

Telephone: 07914 376228
Email: integratingchildren@outlook.com
Web: www.integratingchildren.co.uk
Charity number: 1090260