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Narrator: In 2008 Bradford City council became one of the path finder councils receiving funding from the governments transformation program, aiming higher for disabled children. The allocation for the district was just under 5.2 million pounds. One hundred and forty thousand pounds of this was carved out for a brand new scheme to train and empower a group of young people with severe and complex health needs. The groups would become known as Bradford's peer champions.

Shannon: The main role of the peer champion will be to go out into groups within the community and raise awareness in terms of rights erm, and also hear what other people have to say and what their issues are erm up to commissioners and people that plan services and to make sure that their voices are heard.

Narrator: To do this the young people need to be trained and today they're making a start. The peer champions are designing individualised logos for sweatshirts. They're aimed at identifying the peer champions as individuals within a recognised group and they'll be used when visiting other groups.

FS1: You know what you can do on your sweatshirt? You can ... I've got these pastels, wait here a second I'm gonna get them.

Shannon: We've got problems in terms of people's attitudes to them, how the young people are going to be received and protecting them from erm any discrimination either directly or indirectly that might come. Erm, we don't want that to happen, it's about making sure that them ideas are able to be implemented in the best interest of the young people and not just because it's an idea that somebody's had.

Narrator: As an established expert in the area, Barnardo's seen and heard was approached to set up and over see the training of the young people.

Ann: When we were considering how to really develop a participation service, we were obviously very keen to have people who know how to work with young

people er but equally we were also quite interested in the fact that Barnardo's erm, as an organisation were doing similar work in terms of participation work with er, with adults i.e. the parents and carers.

Narrator: Key staff with an experience of participation work with young people needed to be recruited and quickly.

Shannon: One of the first challenges we had erm given that we were commissioned to deliver this service is actually recruiting the staff to do it. Even the interview at that point involves the erm, young people. It involved children with disabilities, we got a panel together and I had to do some work with them to go through what the job spec was and to ask them what they felt was important for [unclear 02.48] we're going to support them through this work.

Mark: We've got a wide range of erm abilities and special needs across the children that we're working with and we need to be as inclusive as we possible can so we need to enable all the children to have their input into our processes so quite a multi skilled team that we were looking to put together but we were lucky to find people with those skills.

Narrator Newly appointed staff approached specialist and main stream schools in the area appealing to students to apply for the chance to become a peer champion. The aim to get the voices of disabled young people heard by those commissioning and delivering services.

Sarah: The peer champions had to prepare and deliver a one minute presentation. We weren't looking for super confident people but people who eventually would feel confident in going out to other settings and meeting other young people.

Narrator: A similar training course already existed but was aimed at adults with learning difficulties. The approach needed to be revised if it was going to appeal to teenagers with the shorter attention span and varying ranges of communication needs.

Shannon: We've got some young people that have got autism, we've got a young person with cerebral palsy, erm a young person that uses a wheel chair as a physical disability and some young people with learning disabilities. You've got different communication needs and that takes a lot of work and

preparation to make sure that that young persons got access to their preferred method of communication so you're not imposing a method that works for all on to them erm so they can express themselves as individuals really.

Narrator: Samina Tariq a participation worker for Barnardo's redesigned the existing adult course and used it to train the young people in preparation for their work in the community.

Samina: One of the concerns for myself was, are we putting these young people in a situation where we're reinforcing a kind of very tragic view of disabled children and young people where they're going and oh wow aren't they wonderful kind of thing erm, and how brave are they to come here and talk about their issues and what we want to do it not reinforce a very stigmatised role of disabled young people. All the requirements of the courses that it's delivered by a disabled person so what they get is, the role model's disabled adults who are able to challenge them, maybe in a way that a non disabled person isn't. You'd able to joke with them, we'd make it okay to be disabled, to be ... and to except impairment as another form of their identity rather than something that they need to be ashamed of or shy away from.

Narrator: While Samina planned the training course, other staff within the team concentrated on the logistics.

Shannon: Each time I'd ask to have a health care plan erm, which looks at all of the needs including moving and handling needs if they are a wheel chair user and might need assistance in terms of going to the toilet or special equipment or adaptations. It also looks at health, at medical consent, photographic consent and communication and behavioural aspects as well. Some very obvious difficulties when accessing buildings, about is it disability accessible because even though we've got disability discrimination act, it's not ... not every building is compliant as yet, so we've still got them physical challenges. We've got problem with transport and how expensive taxi's are. The children with disabilities and it's not like you or I getting a taxi ten miles down the road. The prices can often be doubled for children with disabilities.

Narrator: The training sessions aimed at improving services for disabled young people by giving them an input into their design required the young people to examine themselves and the way some people in society may view them.

Samina: One of the biggest thing that I find, disabled young people do not want to accept that they don't openly say yes I'm a disabled person which I can empathise because growing up it was not a word that I liked to use because to me at that point it meant and is it does for a lot of our young people today, it means some kind of personal inadequacy. I think that has a lot of impact of disabled young people's lives growing up. It means you're not likely to value yourself, you're not likely when you go to schools, colleges or when you're out and about to challenge people's attitudes towards you. If you're going to be thinking in the medical way whereas the social approach kind of turns it on the head really. It sees disability not as a personal, tragic issue that you need to deal with by yourself or your family needs to deal with it kind of turns on its head and it sees disability as an equality issue.

Sarah: What would be some of the things that you might want to take out to them that you think would ... erm would support them?

MS1: The right to speak up about your opinions, you have the right to have your own opinion.

Samina: Damien, you just said something a few minutes ago.

Damien: Making fun of people.

Samina: Yep, making fun of people.

Damien: Because I was in a wheelchair, people used to torment me and wind me up and touch my controls and stuff so when I told the teachers they didn't really do anything so.

Narrator: Each training session was planned and data recorded to form a frame work of each member's progress that could be analysed throughout the training period.

Mark: For every session, yeah they'll be a detailed session plan and they'll be the objectives for that session erm and erm evaluation at the end both from

young people and you know from the people working on the ... on the sessions so all that then gets fed into our course to be returned so you can ... you can learn as you go along. We have to be ... we have to be reactive as well erm so you know we've got the pro active approach prior to the work started but then we need to be, if we need to change course in the middle and we need to know what we need to do.

Narrator: Although difficult to quantify the success of the project at this stage. Staff at Bradford are positive about the schemes results and importantly its process and how that affects young people.

Mark: A member of staff will notice a massive change in self esteem for a young person but quantifying that and getting that down into a written report you know, these results don't fit easily into boxes and we're not [unclear 08.54] so we can't measure them like that.

Ann: Well I think the first you know measure of success is if young people have continued with a program because young people vote with their feet, you know any young person does if it's something that their not wanting to do or they don't feel they're getting anything out of it they'll go somewhere else. I think I'm hoping that the real message is that ... to them is that actually we value their input. Erm, and if we can do it at this stage when they're young people then you know, these are the people in the future who are going to be informing policy.

Shannon: But now they're all lifting their heads up and they're having more of a presence and that says to me that that's helping their self esteem and that they're feeling more important and that they're valued.

Narrator: The peer champions will face a range of complex communication needs when they begin work in the community visiting other groups.

Shannon: It's my job to make sure that that's meaningful participation and that they get heard at a higher level which is why I attend the aiming high steering group and feed back the young peoples views and make sure people from that group come and listen to them directly and that it, you know their views are considered and acted upon rather than it being a token gesture.

- Sarah: They're going to go out to a group with visual impairment so that'll be a really big erm, communication need to address around maybe the use of the brail. I suppose for communication, understanding communication needs and supporting them for me is the foundation of participation that if you haven't addressed the communication needs there's going to be no consultation, there's going to be no participation of those groups. It's absolutely the foundation stone.
- Narrator: The projects been both a steep and a tough learning curve for staff.
- Shannon: There isn't a set criteria for this. We are developing as we go along but what we won't do is erm, expect them young people to go out and muddle their way through participation session with young people because that's not fair to them or the young people and it won't ... it won't allow them to communicate their views.
- Mark: I think even we underestimated the amount of preparation time that it would take developing the erm, the work ... the actual planning for the young people because of the, the different needs and the levels of support the young people required.
- Shannon: It takes a lot of planning, a lot of hard work you know. There's staff that I work with that work all day, every day Monday to Friday and above that. They do weekend work sometimes and they work quite work quite late into the evenings, they're very committed.
- Ann: We've got a lot of evidence to say that if families and young people are involved in helping us design the service, those are the services that will work.
- MS2: Okay, come back then before the training. What other ways did you not perhaps feel confidence?
- Damien: Er, nerves, nervous.
- MS2: So you used to feel nervous?
- Damien: Yeah.
- FS1: He never used to speak to people he was that shy.

MS2: Doesn't everybody have the right to speak?

MS3: To be heard.

MS2: I think that's more to the point isn't it, to be heard. Everyone can speak not everybody's heard though.

Narrator: The peer champions rap is a light hearted way of informing other groups who they are and what they do.

[Rapping together]

[Shows credits]

[End of Recording]