

# In Brief

Evaluation of a drama based intervention **Jump Together** as a multi-agency training tool to assist planning and joint working within South West Healthy Care Partnerships.



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Teenage  
Pregnancy  
Unit



A collaboration between the National Children's Bureau, the Teenage Pregnancy Unit, the Arts Council England and Myrtle Theatre Company

Centre for Public Health Research

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## Background

Interactive drama has been shown to be effective in working with sensitive and complex areas of health promotion such as teenage pregnancy in vulnerable and looked after young people (Orme et al., 2006; Sawney et al., 2003; Beebee, 1999). Drama also has the potential to utilise a number of interactive learning approaches and offers the opportunity for observation-based learning with an interprofessional group viewing and exploring social and relationship issues raised within a play or vignette. A post-drama workshop can also provide opportunities for interactive activities in which participants share knowledge and experience (exchange-based learning), work together to solve problems (action-based learning) and re-enact or role-play situations relating to the play/vignette (simulation-based learning) (see Barr 2002 for full discussion). Used within an interprofessional learning context, drama is identified as a powerful medium to enhance awareness around collaborative working and improve multi-agency working (McKay & Bright, 2005). This sets the context for the development of Jump Together, a drama project aimed at assisting planning and joint working within South West Healthy Care Partnerships outlined below.

## Overview of the project

The development of Healthy Care Partnerships aims to bring together new and existing networks around improving a range of health outcomes for children and young people looked after. The National Children's Bureau, with funding from the Teenage Pregnancy Unit and Arts Council England, commissioned a piece of innovative stimulus drama to facilitate and enhance the partnerships and further develop the collaborative working between a range of professionals working with these children. This new initiative, Jump Together, is a drama performance and an accompanying workshop involving members of five multi-agency partnerships in the South West Region. These included a range of stakeholders: foster carers, residential social workers and operational staff e.g. health visitors, doctors, educators, teenage pregnancy co-ordinators, service managers and strategic developers, all of whom play a significant role in shaping and delivering services for children and young people looked after.

The University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE) was commissioned by the National Children's Bureau, the Teenage Pregnancy Unit and the Arts Council England to undertake an evaluation of a tour of Project Jump Together across five Healthy Care Partnerships between October 2005 and April 2006. The evaluation aimed to examine the effectiveness of a multiagency training tool using drama performance and techniques to assist in the planning and joint working strategies within five South West Region Healthy Care Partnerships.

## Methods

UWE's study consisted of a process and outcome evaluation which sought to understand the views of participants of Jump Together. In addition we examined the role of Jump Together as a tool for enhancing multi-agency partnerships, building capacity in Healthy Care and multi-agency partnerships, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the project as a method of multi-agency training and formulating recommendations for further development.

The evaluation methods included standardised observation, pre- and post-intervention survey and in depth follow-up interviews with those professionals who took part. Interview data was also collected from a range of stakeholders including members of the Theatre Company and the commissioners. Research participants were identified through a range of agencies and organisations that took part in the project. Prior to the intervention six out of a potential ten teenage pregnancy and healthy care co-ordinators were interviewed across the five participating areas to establish the current position of the partnership. Standardised observation data collection focused on assessing the levels and quality of participation across all five performances. The pre- and post-intervention survey elicited data from one hundred and six participants representing a 94% response rate. This aimed to ascertain their views on a range of issues including: partnership working, healthy care partnerships and the quality and ongoing impact of the drama.

In addition twenty five participants across a range of organisations and professions were identified for follow-up in-depth interview, once more gaining reflections on the day, the impact on practice and areas for project improvement. Four additional interviews were undertaken with the participating actor/company director, administrator and the commissioner of the project, focusing on levels of engagement by organisations and issues of sustainability.

## Findings

### **Drama as a method of facilitating interactive interprofessional learning**

- The original Project Jump was targeted at 'hard to reach' young people and delivered a play and support package that enabled young people to consider their sexual health behaviour and its consequence for themselves and others. The new initiative Jump Together used drama performance and techniques to assist in the planning and joint working strategies with professionals within five South West Region Healthy Care Partnerships (Orme et al., 2006).
- This pilot project consisted of a high quality commissioned play [from a well known regional drama company] developed from consultation with young people and innovative drama approaches which shaped the workshop activities. It demonstrated the potential for enthusiastic participation by a wide range of organisations and professionals working in the fields of vulnerable and looked after children and young people.
- The compelling nature of the drama meant that participants were able to place young people and their needs at the centre of their thinking and reminded

participants of their original motivations for working with such vulnerable young people illustrated in the following comments:

*I felt refreshed and it reminded me about what drives young people's behaviour and to support, encourage, empower young people to find their own answers rather than give advice based on my values/experiences.* (Leaving Care Personal Advisor)

*I completely agree that drama and creativity are the key both to children becoming empowered, as well as empowering adults to help them.* (Equalities Co-ordinator Education)

Given the sensitive and complex area of sexual health and young people looked after, a drama approach offered the opportunity to help participants think creatively about how to work collaboratively to meet the needs of young people involved in a range of risky behaviours, such as unsafe sex, and who are living in difficult social circumstances.

- A drama approach draws on a range of interactive techniques that enable professionals to acquire in particular the skills, attitudes and confidence required to develop collaborative competence.
- This drama drew on a range of drama techniques that participants experienced as innovative, different, relevant and emotionally engaging, in contrast to more traditional multi-professional education and training initiatives.
- Respondents felt this type of approach was better than didactic teaching because it was more interactive, challenging, exciting and fun. Those involved with direct work with young people such as foster carers found the experiential approach particularly helpful. These views were eloquently summarised in the following quotes:

*Some brilliant short exercises that highlight communication. Really useful exercises that made me think about doing my job "too fast" or "too slow". Need to be aware of pace and language with young people.* (Personal Advisor Connexions)

*A breath of fresh air – good to use different medium skills/have to take part and be open.* (Children's social care worker)

*Really interactive, relaxed, informal and I loved the way people were smiling! In our profession we don't see that a lot from professionals.* (Youth Worker)

### **A tool for improved partnership?**

- Prior to attending the workshop, those professionals involved demonstrated a high level of commitment to the principles of collaborative working to meet the needs of young people in a comprehensive, holistic and effective way.
- However, participants recognised that there were still areas in which communication between different professional groups could be further improved.
- Participant outcomes included:
  - increased knowledge and understanding of professional roles
  - enhanced communication
  - improved awareness and ability to manage conflict situations
  - increased trust between professionals.

- Participants talked of feeling an increased awareness and commitment to partnership and an ability to re-focus on their priorities, placing the child at the centre of service development and delivery. This had led to an increased commitment to ensure that contributions to the Healthy Care Partnership involved a wider range of organisations.

*I think our networking with education and health and people, was fairly good beforehand, although it was good for us to work in this different way. We have now engaged more actively with mental health teams and the youth service since Jump Together and the Healthy Care Standard have started. So it has broadened our multi-agency working.* (Healthy Care Partnership Lead)

*It made it a lot easier for me to go out into other agencies... I've made contact with... and discussed some work that I've been doing. And also it's just made me think much more deeply as well about the whole concept of multi-agency working and what it actually means.* (Equalities co-ordinator, education)

#### **The aims of the drama workshop included:**

- a. The development of partnership working with a range of organisations working in the fields of vulnerable and looked after children and young people.
- b. The further development and strengthening of existing Healthy Care Partnerships including a wider membership from those working in the field of vulnerable children and young people. This included where appropriate supporting the restructuring of children and family services around a child centred agenda.
- c. Bridging the gap between the strategic objectives of Healthy Care Partnerships and the broader vulnerable children's and young people's agenda including teenage pregnancy and social inclusion.

#### **Areas identified for improvement included:**

- Greater clarity about the purpose of the workshops was needed in relation to both the day and how the workshops impacted on professional practice.
- Participants needed to be informed about how the activities within the workshop related to specific aims of the day.
- Inclusion of learning activities drawing on a greater range of professional perspectives needs to be included to give professionals the opportunity to focus on exploring and resolving the practical challenges facing multiprofessional teams working within the field. This should include the opportunity to develop conflict resolution skills.
- Learning activities should demonstrate an understanding of the distinction between participants' working in roles focused on strategy and policy development and those working in front-line service delivery and management.
- Creating small vignettes and group work to allow for discussions that challenge different professional perspectives on a range of real life situations relating to the health of young people looked after may be useful.

## Recommendations

- Clearly drama offers an exciting and innovative learning opportunity for professionals working in complex and uncertain environments to come together to enhance their individual and collective partnership working skills around the needs of vulnerable and looked after children and young people. Organisations should more readily consider a drama approach in their attempts to develop and enhance interagency working.
- Building on the good practice guide developed around Theatre in Education to Deliver Sex and Relationship Education (see Sawney et al., 2003) further guidance needs to be developed for commissioners on the use of drama education and its use with health and social care practitioners. Similarly, drama based worked could be used more widely in a variety of settings to promote multi-agency working.
- While the quality of the workshop was rated very positively in terms of the skills of the actors to encourage interaction and participation, significant issues raised by participants included:
  - the clarity of the overall aims of the day
  - the need for more thorough briefing about the day
  - a more systematic approach to training needs analysis for Healthy Care
  - Partnerships recruited to the project, including the balance between strategic and front-line professionals.
- A pre-workshop pack should be developed for all participants to include information about Healthy Care Partnerships together with a programme of the day to ensure more effective preparation for the day.
- To support the synergy between policy and practice there needs to be structured planning after the workshop to catalyse further activity within the Healthy Care Partnerships. This could take the form of action planning or the development of multi- agency information sheets to sustain the learning and networking achieved through the workshops.
- Some restructuring of the overall workshop could include a number of changes such as:
  - co-facilitation between drama practitioners and experts in the field of public health
  - development of a pre-performance briefing pack and action planning
  - more systematic approach to follow-up work.
- The pre-briefing pack could include examples of the following:
  - introductory letters to participants [also] covering the aims and objectives of the day;
  - suggested list of participants to increase their involvement and facilitate networking
  - pre-workshop reading
  - activities including a short biography from each of the participating professionalsto share within relevant workshop activities.

### **Practical solutions to issues highlighted by the evaluation.**

- More comprehensive preparation of agencies and organisations prior to the performance and workshops including adequate preparation time, pre-workshop literature and overtly linking the aims of the workshop to the needs of each Healthy Care Partnership should be prioritised in any further work undertaken.
- Issues raised about the content, structure and organisation of the workshops could be addressed through co-facilitation by drama practitioners and experts from the field (e.g. Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinators or Healthy Care Partnership Leads). Protected time to support strategic and front-line practitioners to work separately and integration of action planning within the day to develop clear future direction and training are also priorities.
- Co-facilitation with the Theatre Company could be undertaken by a range of professionals: partnership consultants, public health specialists or trainers within any of the contributing agencies who have specific skills in interagency development.
- Further development of partnership working between commissioners, Healthy Care Partnership leads, Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinators and other key stakeholders would support decisions about the relationship between Healthy Care guidance and practice in working with vulnerable and looked after children and young people.
- Attention should be given to how the Healthy Care Guidance (Department for Education and Skills and National Children's Bureau, 2005) can meet the challenges of each local partnership. However, the sustainability of the project will depend upon delivering the project as a series of workshops packaged as a regional tour to ensure economies of scale and cost effectiveness.
- There are clear opportunities to further develop good quality practice standards for commissioning theatre work with professionals and drama projects and to create a national profile for using drama for interagency training purposes.
- Communicating the learning from the South West Pilot to other Healthy Care Partnerships nationally could be done by in a number of ways including: effective dissemination of the report and executive summary to a wide range of audiences; Primary Care Trusts, Children and Young People's Services and Local Authority newsletters; a national forum for Healthy Care Partnership leads; academic conferences and professional publications.
- Integrating the learning from this project together with that from the Evaluation of Project Jump (Orme et al., 2006) will help to demonstrate the importance and potential impact of drama work in providing early interventions to reduce risk taking behaviour for vulnerable groups such as children and young people looked after. This could be done with some additional commentary and disseminated via the Teenage Pregnancy Unit website and which would raise the profile of Healthy Care Partnerships.

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