

Broadening Participation

‘Sail for Independence’ Project



by
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In July this year a group of Post 16 young people with learning disabilities took part in a 12 week project titled “Sail for Independence”.

The general aim was to use sailing as a vehicle to provide these young people with the opportunity of developing their self confidence, communication, team-working, motor / co-ordination and social skills and enable school staff and carers to extend learning and develop the transfer of skills through the use of a new and unusual environment. A more specific aim was to give young people with learning disabilities the opportunity to develop independence through learning to sail and integrating within a youth sailing club.



Expedition
and
Adventure

The project started with around 20 young people sailing once a week during the summer term at the Caldecotte Project Outdoor Education Centre and culminated with 8 of these young people taking part in a week's residential, living and working together to sail a 44ft Sailing yacht around the Solent. During the residential, sailing was a very important part of the experience but by no means the only part. Other aspects included: living in close proximity to others; cooking and cleaning on board; working together; visiting HMS Victory; Ten Pin bowling; shopping and sometimes simply just having the strength and perseverance to keep going. For many, the confidence they gained from having tackled the balance and co-ordination necessary to move over different surfaces and heights on the yacht had a direct impact on improving their co-ordination and movement on the land. This had the most profound effect on those who had the most physical difficulties.



The evidence for the success of the project and the difference it has made to the lives of these young people is demonstrated by the fact that, on their return, 3 of the young people, now members of the Caldecotte Youth Sailability Club, had gained the confidence to sail solo in Access Dinghies for the first time. Further evidence comes directly from the comments and actions of the young people themselves. For example; J, who prior to the trip had very low self-confidence and self-esteem together with extremely poor mobility, stated he now wanted "to carry on with physical activity and would like to do more sailing". He also said that he would like to go to college now, as he knew he could "get anywhere!" It didn't matter

if there wasn't a lift! As a result of this experience J has been able to achieve the Exploration Section of the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award.

This Project was a partnership between the Caldecotte Project, an LEA Outdoor Centre, primarily catering for young people, based in Milton Keynes. The Redway School, a special school for young people with severe, profound and multiple learning disabilities, and Connexions. It was funded by the New Opportunities Fund.

If you would like to discuss any aspects of this Project or similar opportunities please contact Guy Malpas at the Caldecotte Project on 01908 366921. ■

Author Notes

Guy Malpas is Team Leader for the Caldecotte Project Outdoor Education Centre.

Photographs
from the author