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Girls matter and so do boys: Emotional literacy - The way forward

It is time that emotional literacy was given a higher profile. It is only by investing in professionals and practitioners that spend the time on improving social and emotional skills that we will begin to see a shift in young people's behaviour. The essential part of any support package for a young person should include a mentor. The essential function of this person would be to model positive behaviour and be readily accessible to the young person.

At AJ Consultancy we work from the perspective of the child or young person in developing our training courses and it was because of this approach that we identified the concerns of young people.

Girls Matter and Boys Matter Conferences

Our work led to the birth of the Girls Matter and Boys Matter Conferences in November 2007. At various workshops held for young people they began to express their fears and concerns about growing up in 21st century Britain. It became evident that whilst there were some generic and common issues there were some that were clearly gender specific. We took note of these concerns and realised that a multi-agency audience was the platform required so that professionals could work together to create solutions for young people.

The issue of low aspirations requires more than the curriculum to be altered. It requires education to collaborate with businesses to provide apprenticeships and community organisations to provide mentoring and positive role models.

The issue of young people being recruited into gangs requires more than the Police working on the problem. The awareness of parents needs to be raised and there have to be positive activities available in the local communities for young people to have access to real alternatives.

We held a whole day conference that focused on five key issues. The main audience was professionals and practitioners that work with or support young people, parents and young people. Some key issues across both conferences included: Teenage pregnancy, Fatherhood; positive body images; media influences; young people and gangs: raising aspirations and role models.

A common theme from the conferences was an acknowledgement of the power of multi-agency working and also the need to listen to young people and find out how best agencies can support them.

Workshops

We have also developed a series of workshops, entitled 'Stop! Baby Ahead'. They focus on the true (emotional, practical and financial) cost of becoming a teenage parent. They have been directed at young males to raise awareness of the issues of becoming a father.

Changes are required and we can make them but it has to be a collaborative and concerted effort. It is worth investing the time and energy into disaffected and disengaged young people as if we are honest the other alternative doesn't bear thinking about.