

Making a Meal of Service User Participation



This was a project to help social work students to learn more about the lives of people with learning disabilities.



We wanted to find a way of doing this that was away from university buildings.

We thought that university classrooms might not be a friendly place for people to talk about their life.



We thought an evening meal in a restaurant would be a more friendly way to do this.



University of Brighton

**Community
University
Partnership
Programme**

We got funding from the Community University Partnership Programme at Brighton University to do this project.



The things that we wanted to happen in this project were:



1. Students would get a better understanding of people with learning disabilities and what they want from their lives.
2. People with learning disabilities would get an understanding of what life is like for social work students.



3. Stay Up Late would find out more about what life is like for people working in Social Work. This could help with their campaigning work.



4. The Social Work teachers at University of Brighton could find new ways of involving people who use services in teaching students.



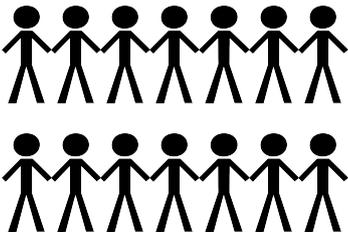
What we did in this project



We had 3 meals on evenings in different restaurants.

The participants chose the restaurants.

They thought about access and also what food they all liked.



6 students and 6 people with learning disabilities took part.



Participants were asked about the project afterwards.



We thought about possible risks that there might be for people involved in the project.

We wanted to make sure that nobody would be put at risk of harm by being involved in the project.



We asked people why they got involved in the project.



People with learning disabilities said:

- To try something new
- To meet new people
- To enjoy opportunities to go out and have nice food
- To make new friends and have some fun
- To be able to teach students about their lives



The students said the same sorts of things as the people with learning disabilities. They also said:

- It was good being able to meet people who use services in a personal way
- It was good to meet in a relaxed and informal place. This made them feel everyone was equal

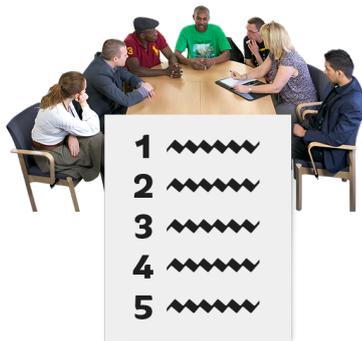


Planning the project

Before we had the meals we had a planning meeting. Participants all said they found this helpful. We used this meeting to:

- Get to know each other
- Talk about the purpose of the project
- We talked about our favourite types of food and places to eat
- We also had fun chatting with each other

After each meal we made our own ‘menu’ of things that we’d talked about over dinner. Some of the things we talked about were:



- Food
- Leisure activities
- Hobbies
- Work
- Support
- Housing
- Relationships
- Education
- Films
- Politics and funding cuts
- Families
- Travel
- Health and mental health
- Social media
- Being independent

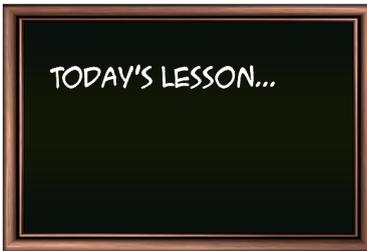


Some of the other things that we found out:

The students said they liked the repeated meals as we got to know each other much better at each meal.



Meeting in a relaxed and informal way meant that everyone got to know each other in a more personal way.



How the project helped social work students to learn more:

The students said that they found out more about the lives of people with learning disabilities.

They said that they got a much better understanding of what people want from their lives.

The students thought that this way of involving people could work with people who use different kinds of services.

Things we had to think a lot about:

We thought a lot about what we should share with each other.

We thought about the best way for people to sit at the tables in the restaurant.





What we found out:

It was a successful project.

We think this could be a good way for other students to be involved in learning from people who use services.

Everyone learned about each other through the project.

Stay Up Late found it really helpful working with the University.

Stay Up Late will be able to talk about the project in their other work around the country.

The University of Brighton have learned about a different way for people who use services to teach their social work students.