**BLOG 15 -The impact of employing a SEND Youth Engagement Officer**

Poppy Power!

Since being appointed SEND Youth Engagement Officer for Wirral in June 2019, Poppy has made a significant difference to Wirral children, young people and their families. She has done this in a variety of ways. She is driven and determined to identify areas requiring better resource/provision to bring about change and enable the SEND population to receive the support they need. The support they deserve.

Thinking creatively and challenging herself to find solutions, Poppy's quest is, simply put, to make things better for others. Growing up she didn't have the greatest journey in terms of SEND support, but she is passionate and committed to making the experience better for others. The impact of her joining the SEND Participation & Engagement service is immense. She brings a daily strand of youth voice to all we do. Being a peer educator for Wirral’s SEND Youth voice group she has the skills to use that voice to great effect. Poppy represents the young SEND population in Wirral on a local, regional and national level. She confidently challenges dated thinking and processes. She offers solutions. She brings about change. Poppy has devised and run a SEND programme for Wirral schools which affords the opportunity to listen to the young peoples' views and, signpost them and their families to services to help them. Growing up Poppy was selective mute for a period of 11 years. Working in schools, she's met with two young girls with selective mutism. She instantly struck up rapport with both girls and was able to communicate with them. She met their Teachers, TA's and Parents to offer answers to their many questions and guidance as to the best approach and support methods. She gave the parents hope. A hope that their daughters can go on to achieve and reach aspirational goals in family life, academically and in the wider world.

Poppy has also supported the Assistant Director for Education during a recent SEND Consultation exercise to inform the SEND Strategy 2020-2024. Poppy was tasked with formatting a questionnaire for SEND young people from design to completion. The questionnaire could be accessed both on-line and paper copy to enable a wide age range and those ‘digitally disadvantaged’ to have opportunity to have their say.

Traditionally views of young people with an EHC plan are sought but rarely those categorised as SEN support. The AD and Poppy were keen to capture their voices. COVID 19 landed and interrupted planned engagement but Poppy still had 256 completed surveys returned. A good cross section of ages, living in a far reaching spread of Wirral post codes and a really pleasing number of SEN support responses. The comments were evaluated and common themes emerged. From this the AD was helping to complete the SEND Strategy with objectives that aim to address actual and not perceived needs.

Safety is a big concern for our SEND young people so Poppy applied to be a Merseyside Police Ambassador for the Liverpool City Region. Poppy pushed through her comfort zone to put herself in contention because she knew that, if successful, she could shape and influence and that was a prize well worth winning. Poppy attends sessions in the evenings and at weekends to represent Wirral and has opened up difficult conversations around the safety issues affecting our SEND population such as barriers to them being able to access an independence like their mainstream peers. Poppy is literally changing lives; she is a credit to Wirral!

Sally Tittle

SEND Participation Manager

Wirral Council