

A life that grows

The impact of Grapevine's work on young people with learning disabilities and their families





**A life that
grows**

grapevine 

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In 2011, Grapevine projects worked closely with the following partners in Coventry and beyond: Community Safety Partnership, Children's Short Breaks Service, Connexions, BILD, Family Justice Council, Community Social Work teams, The Carers' Centre, Baginton Fields School, Hereward College, Henley College, Sherbourne Fields School, Alice Stevens School, Corley School, Coventry Youth Service, Community Safety Team, Sky Blues in the Community.

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A rescue mission

As Rishard's mum and a teacher in the City, I know the difficulties that young people face - especially those who don't fit the norm. Families can find the problems overwhelming.

My own family was coming apart at the seams and there seemed to be no escape route. We needed more than a temporary fix. We needed someone to walk alongside us, someone to advocate and help us to find new and meaningful connections for Rishard. Little did we know that a rescue party had been despatched in the form of Grapevine. Things were about to change.

Rishard is flourishing now. He has growing friendships and a purpose in life. He is part of a real community and his old frustrations have faded.

Grapevine's focused work has helped Rishard explore all kinds of avenues. He performs alongside his non-disabled peers with Ego Theatre Company and is a member of its Youth Management Team. Making friends, being invited to house parties, having the odd beer and chatting to girls has been, says Rishard, '*exciting*'.

The transition to adulthood can be very difficult. If Grapevine were not there, things would be so much harder. Their work links so well with what other professionals do so that young people get the best possible support.

I hope that my role as a Grapevine Trustee might give a little back for the life-changing experience we have been offered.

MEL SMITH



Sink or swim?

We wrote this impact report after reading *Sinking and Swimming* published by the Young Foundation, the influential organisation that started, amongst other things, The Open University and Which?.

Sinking and Swimming is an important report about unmet needs in Britain. It reminded us of things we say at Grapevine – that the cause of many people’s recurring problems is isolation: no friends, no workmates, no neighbours who know them.

The report analyses what helps when people go through difficult transitions – including young people moving into adulthood:

‘Having a stable home, an adequate income, supportive relationships and a positive and optimistic attitude can provide the stability and resources people need to deal with big changes in their life. Support and advice from a whole host of organisations can also buffer people from the worst impacts of transition, especially when their approach is non-judgemental, flexible and responsive to that person’s needs.’

Grapevine works with young people to get those things they need to deal with change. And we work with those young people in a particular way – we stand by them, we don’t take over and we stick with them for the long-term.

This report shows how our approach pays off. People become better at dealing with the difficulties of ordinary life. They become both more self-sufficient and more connected to others. They find support in the community and also make a contribution. They are more likely to thrive and less likely to go round and round a revolving door into services.



1 Planning for life

“...FLEXIBLE AND UNDERSTANDING GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT FROM SERVICE PROVIDERS ... WAS ESPECIALLY VALUABLE TO MORE VULNERABLE TRANSITION-MAKERS LACKING FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND SOCIAL SUPPORT.”

Sinking and Swimming, The Young Foundation

For **MANPREET**, turning 18 was threatening. It's the age when people switch from children's to adult services.

Manpreet's autism gives him a strong interest in liquids. He searches them out, examines them and drinks them if he can. So he needs watchful support and he had that at the children's home where he lived after his mum died. The staff worked with him in a person-centred way. For example, knowing Manpreet's love of texture, they stuck bath mats - suckers outwards - on the walls. It was a good place for him.

So it was alarming that, at the transition meetings, only one option was on the table: a move to residential care. Those who cared about Manpreet were worried. He's quiet and doesn't complain. In residential care, he

might easily be left out and become vulnerable. Manpreet's father felt overwhelmed and anxious.

Helen from Grapevine helped make a plan with Manpreet. She spent time getting to know him and his family at home, school and the children's home. Manpreet was always involved and knew that the planning sessions were for him. As well as thinking about where Manpreet would live, the sessions worked on how to increase the number of unpaid people in Manpreet's life.

It wasn't easy to get the plan accepted but Manpreet now has his own supported tenancy. He even got a grant to buy his own trampoline – Manpreet loves trampolining. Things are going well.

Impact

A GOOD PLAN COMES AFTER GETTING TO KNOW SOMEONE WELL – SPENDING TIME WITH THEM AND THE PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT THEM.

In 2011, Grapevine projects helped 38 young people like Manpreet to make a plan.

THE MAIN PROBLEMS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILY WERE:

- * managing change – for example, moving home, leaving school or residential college
- * lack of community involvement, friendships and natural supports
- * few meaningful activities in life.

GRAPEVINE:

- * helped families prepare and submit plans to the social work team. The plans featured personalised, family- and community-based solutions that

can be cheaper than professional care.

- * produced 27 person-centred plans for young people in special schools or college. Sixteen had *'high support needs'* and seven were in local authority care. Fourteen of the young people were from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

Referrals came from services like the Community Learning Disability Team (37%), school and home (37%) and Grapevine's outreach and projects (36%).

Two Grapevine services help people to plan: *All Means All* and *Person-centred Planning*. See page 14 for more information.





2 Building relationships

“EMOTIONAL AND PRACTICAL SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY PROVIDE A CRUCIAL RESOURCE FOR PEOPLE NEGOTIATING TRANSITION.”

Sinking and Swimming, The Young Foundation

At age 18, things looked bleak for **CHLOE**. She had no friends and spent all her time with her family. She was bored, lonely and worried. The whole family felt the strain. There seemed nowhere to go – the only thing on offer was yet another placement.

Chloe's mum, Renu, was desperate: *‘It was doom and gloom’.*

When they called Grapevine for the first time, the family got a surprise. *‘They gave us lots of information straightaway and for the first time we could see there were options. Other services hadn’t done that for us. We went for a visit and couldn’t believe the atmosphere in the buddy project with young people running management meetings. It was warm, friendly.’*

Chloe joined **Get In** and **Help and Connect** and hasn't looked back. She got a buddy, a bigger social group and a very close friend. Her brother says *‘When she comes back from meeting friends at Grapevine, she’s happy – buzzing.’*

At **Help and Connect**, Chloe produced a CV and started applying for jobs. She got a voluntary job under her own steam. Her confidence has grown so much that she now goes into shops to ask about paid work, gives in her CV and makes follow-up calls.

Renu says *‘Chloe is happier, more pro-active. She travels on her own now and she’s busy. So we have more independence, too, and when we’re together, it’s proper family time. The future is brighter.’*

Impact

A PLAN IS IMPORTANT. THEN YOU NEED GOOD RELATIONSHIPS TO SEE YOU THROUGH.

The young people Grapevine met in 2011 often had few friendships or natural supports. They had little positive activity or involvement in the community.

GRAPEVINE'S RESPONSE

During the year Grapevine helped 78 young people build the relationships they need to help them avoid crisis and dependency. According to Coventry City Council's measures, a third of Grapevine's youth work helped to create '*strong families and communities*' and one third helped young people to be '*safe*'.

Our youth projects, residential holiday and the *Buddy Scheme* helped 37

young, non-disabled people to form relationships with their disabled peers.

Young Buddies were trained in advocacy, person-centred planning tools and community connecting.

Grapevine took part in the Anti-Bullying Alliance's work to tackle bullying of children with special educational needs and disabilities. Grapevine's project fostered two-way relationships that would lead to increased empathy and a decrease in bullying.

Grapevine's *Get In* project helped young people to build relationships.

See pages 14-15 for more information.





3 Sticking with people

“...PEOPLE OFTEN ACCESS SERVICES THAT ARE NOT THE RIGHT ONES FOR MEETING THEIR UNDERLYING NEED. WE NEED MORE INSTITUTIONS, ADVISERS AND ACCESS POINTS WHICH ARE HOLISTIC, RATHER THAN FUNCTION SPECIFIC.”

Sinking and Swimming, The Young Foundation

GURPREET: Daljit Heer describes her daughter’s journey with Grapevine. *“The only place Gurpreet went without me was school. It wasn’t a good situation. Her behaviour was difficult. She talked about hitting me. Other family members tried to help but they only wanted Gurpreet if she was “good”. To make her good, they gave her too much food. She was getting too heavy.*

I broke down at the doctor’s. I couldn’t cope but things changed when I met other families at Grapevine. I could see I wasn’t alone.

Gurpreet has done so much with Grapevine – Get In, WATS, and the All Means All girls’ group. She loves getting glammed up for that. She met

people with and without learning disabilities and has a great social life now. She loves to see her friends, do ordinary things, have girl time. And it gave us time for ourselves. She has helped with training, fundraising and recruiting volunteers. She travels on her own and has so many skills now.

Grapevine is helping her work out how she can live independently. We’re all a lot calmer now. Without this help there would have been a lot of damage.’

Grapevine has been by Gurpreet’s side for five years. We have seen her through the changes from school to college. Now we are helping her as she prepares to leave college and start adult life living in her own place.

Impact

GRAPEVINE STANDS BY PEOPLE THROUGH DIFFICULT CHANGES. WE'RE THERE FOR THE WHOLE JOURNEY. THERE'S NO CUT-OFF POINT WHEN PEOPLE REACH 18. WE DON'T SAY 'WE CAN ONLY DO THIS, NOT THAT'.

In 2011, Grapevine helped 103 young people to get the information, representation and support they needed to move on with their lives.

GRAPEVINE WORKERS SUPPORTED YOUNG PEOPLE TO DEAL WITH, FOR EXAMPLE:

- * family conflict
- * getting help from slow or unresponsive services
- * isolation and dependency
- * being left out of decision-making.

We worked with young volunteers who could offer a support network for the long term.

SOME THINGS PEOPLE DID:

- * joined exercise classes
- * learned to cook
- * learned to use the bus
- * had sleepovers
- * contributed to plans and reviews
- * advocated for their new friends
- * socialised and had a good time.

Young people told us that they now have new relationships that support and enhance their lives.

Five Grapevine projects – working together over time – are able to stick with people and help them speak up: [Advocacy](#), [All Means All](#), [Person-centred Planning](#), [Get In](#) and the [Support Service](#).

See pages 14-15 for more information.





4 Working together

“...RESPONSIBILITIES TEND TO BE DIVIDED UP. PUBLIC AGENCIES’ RESPONSIBILITIES ARE DIVIDED BY CHRONOLOGICAL AGE, AND BOTH PUBLIC AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS TEND TO DIVIDE BY FUNCTION IN WAYS THAT CUT AGAINST WHAT PEOPLE NEED.”

Sinking and Swimming, The Young Foundation

WORKING TOGETHER TO STOP HATE CRIME

For months, a young woman on her way to college was bullied at the bus stop. She had to move college to escape the abuse.

A vulnerable family with a son who has a learning disability was victimised by local people. They suffered verbal abuse and threats. Their property was damaged.

Stories like these are horrible but they are also common. Research by Mencap in 2000 found that nine out of ten people with learning disabilities had been harassed or attacked in the previous year.

Grapevine was engaged by Coventry City Council's Community Safety

Team to work with young people around their experiences of disability hate crime in further education. In workshops, young people talked about their experiences and, together, we designed three short videos that would raise awareness.

The young people worked closely with the filmmakers. They learned to storyboard their ideas. They prepared scripts and acted.

We involved over 50 young people in the work and the result is a teaching resource pack that features the videos. The pack will be used nationwide.

The work, funded by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service, aims to discourage perpetrators by showing the effects on victims.

Impact

IT'S ALWAYS BEST THAT SERVICES WORK TOGETHER. BUT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, IT'S CRITICAL.

Mainstream organisations like the youth service want to involve young people with a learning disability but sometimes they don't know the best way. If young people are to get the support they need, we have to work together.

IN 2011, GRAPEVINE COLLABORATED WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS ON A NUMBER OF PROGRAMMES:

- * Working with Youth Services, Grapevine helped young people with a learning disability to be part of Coventry's **Democracy Project** including the Youth Council and the Integrated Youth and Support Service Board.
- * Grapevine ran **Short Breaks** as part of the City Council's **Time for Me** programme. Dozens came to summer-holiday sessions like **Phunky Photo Shoot**; **Media Massive** movie-making; **Pamper Party** makeovers; speaking out at **Your Shout**; organising the future at **Plan It**.
- * Also for the City Council: two youth clubs and a film club are running; a youth forum is just starting.
- * **11 million take over** day: we reported for Coventry Telegraph. We offered training and workshops that helped professionals know how to involve young people with learning disabilities.

- * Working for Coventry's Community Safety Team, Grapevine helped young people to produce films that aim to reduce bullying. The resource pack will be used nationally. (See the story opposite.)

- * Also, young people assessed the organisation using the National Youth Agency's **Hear By Right** standards and created Grapevine's **Youth Charter** and **Involvement Plan**. We have a young Trustee and a Young Management Team who make decisions on budgets and activities and help recruit and train staff, volunteers and partners.





Grapevine projects

THESE ARE THE GRAPEVINE PROJECTS THAT CARRIED OUT THE WORK DESCRIBED IN THIS REPORT.

Working with young people:

ADVOCACY helps people to get their voice heard if, for example, they want to move home, have a formal meeting or have suffered abuse or neglect. You can see a film about Grapevine Advocacy:

www.grapevinecovandwarks.org/advocacy-film.aspx

CONNECTING PEOPLE helps people to build strong networks of friendship and support by connecting them to others in their community.

ALL MEANS ALL offers advocacy and planning support to young people and families from Black and Minority Ethnic groups aged 14 to 25. There is an external evaluation report about All Means All on the Grapevine website:

www.grapevinecovandwarks.org/all-means-all.aspx

GET IN helps young people with a learning disability get out more, have a say in their city and enjoy an ordinary teenage life.

PERSON-CENTRED PLANNING

offers planning support to young people and families getting ready to leave special school.

THE SUPPORT SERVICE

offers a drop-in service that helps small groups to organise nights out with their friends. We help young people to organise club nights in Coventry and offer intensive one-to-one support to people who want to make connections in their community.

Grapevine youth work

Grapevine youth work was highlighted as a cameo of good practice in anti-bullying research by Cambridge University. **We're All The Same** aimed to close the social distance between young people with and without a learning disability:

www.grapevinecovandwarks.org/cameo-of-practice.aspx





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