

Engaging with the Wider Community

HE & GFE & Community (HE) I am the change – Epson phab



Background

When learners are empowered to engage with and change their learning environment, and when organisations know how to listen to feedback and embrace student involvement, there is great potential for cross-organisational change.

A learning community goes much further than the classroom – it impacts on the wider community in which the learning organisation is based. The local community can provide a variety of commercial and recreational opportunities that enhance the learning experience, and learners are also effected by and can affect the physical environment in which their learning organisation is based.

Learner Representatives both directly and indirectly can impact on local communities in their pursuit of a quality, holistic educational experience.

About Warwickshire University

The University of Warwickshire is a public research university located in Coventry, England. It was founded in 1965 as part of a government initiative to expand access to higher education.

Their Story: What has Happened & How

In October 2012, NUS launched *I Am The Change*; an exciting project to support students to campaign on real issues that matter to them. Students across the UK submitted video entries to highlight an issue they felt should be addressed and after receiving hundreds of submissions, a panel of judges chose Courtney Giles, a student from Warwick University, as the winner.

Courtney wanted to run a campaign to save her local youth club, Epsom Phab, from closure. Part of the prize for winning *I Am The Change* was a bespoke campaign training day from NUS. Although the video entry came from a university student, the identified campaign team consisted of local school and college student representatives, as well as students from the university. When they first met for training, this was the first time young people from Surrey had been consulted on the proposed changes to this service for young people.

They spent the day setting aims for their campaign (to keep the centre or replace with one that has the same provision without a break in service), mapping influential allies and putting

together their arguments. Courtney said, “We found out effective ways to campaign, rather than just being angry. Now we can put our resources to good use. We learnt how we can turn all our emotions into something positive.”

In the months that followed, the #saveepsomphab campaign organised marches and stunts, asked supporters to sign their petition and write case studies of what Epsom Phab has done for their families, and lobbied local decision-makers which generated lots of press attention and public support. As a result of the campaign, Surrey County Council has postponed the closure of the youth centre until December 2013. In the meantime, Courtney and the campaign team are continuing to lobby using the original contract of the youth club, which restricts the council from moving them from the centre unless another purpose-built centre is ready. For more information, go to www.phab.org

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eV26TT5KqwQ&feature=g-upl>)

Impact, Successes & Ideas for Action

In this example, the impact on the local community is significant, and benefits all young people and their families in the area, not just students. Working collaboratively to support local businesses and organisations demonstrates the value of student leaders and highlights the influence they have within their communities. And not only does this demonstrate how learner reps can have a positive impact in their local community, it also enhances the reputation of the learning organisation they belong to as much of the support and encouragement to go out into the community will come from the organisation in the first place – a positive image for a community organisation!