

The Bristol Project

The Bristol Project film is about five teenage boys. These young people worked with Professor Sue Roulstone and Dr Clodagh Miskelly from the University of the West of England and a film production company to explore the research question:

'What is it like to be a teenager with speech and language difficulties?'



The answers to that question were not what the researchers expected to hear. The young people challenge us to focus on their interests and their positive contributions rather than on their difficulties. The film portrays these teenagers with affection and humour and gives them a chance to share their enthusiasms. Although the boys' difficulties with communication may be apparent in the film, we are challenged to consider our role in defining their difficulties.

The speech & language therapy research unit would be grateful for a voluntary contribution of £8.00 per copy to cover duplication costs and postage & packing.

Speech, language and communication difficulties can persist into teenage and adult years. Yet we know little about what it's like for young people with communication impairment.

Five teenage boys made this fresh and surprising film to show us this perspective.

The boys' families are members of Afasic, a UK charity established to help children and young people with speech, language and communication difficulties and their families. The boy and their families volunteered to work with the researchers and the film-maker to make this film together over a period of a year and a half.

In the film we are challenged by the young people to focus on their interests and their positive contributions rather than on their difficulties. The film portrays these teenagers with affection and humour and we share their enthusiasms. Although the boys' difficulties with communication are apparent in the film they challenge us to consider our role in defining their difficulties.

Things people have said about the film

“Funny, provocative, interesting, challenging”

“An excellent film so brave in its willingness to hand over control to the boys.”

“A great mix of humour and poignancy”

“I loved the different perspective – that the communication difficulties are ours, as we are the people that don’t understand”

And one from the boys....

“The film was brilliantly produced. I couldn’t ask for more 10/10 5-star”

How the film was made

The film was part of a project to explore ‘what it’s like to be a teenager with speech and language difficulties?’ Participation was open to anyone between 11 and 16 years with speech and language impairments. The project and film making process was reviewed and approved by an NHS Local Research Ethics Committee. The ethics committee required that the boys’ identities be protected within the film. The stars of the film were recruited at an ‘activity day’ organised by Afasic for teenagers in Bristol. The research team attended that day and talked to the young people and their families about the project and asked for volunteers: five boys (no girls) and their families agreed to join us. Over the ensuing 18 months, five half-day and three full-day workshops were held with the boys. We describe some the activities below. From the start, live recording played a large part of the workshops; two cameras were always available and rolling throughout each workshop. The researchers initially positioned the cameras in order to record the activities. Progressively, the boys took control over how the cameras were used and what was captured on film. As the sessions progressed, the filmmakers became increasingly involved, facilitating the animation workshop and working with the boys. The producer provided the boys with the means to record audio diaries and visited their homes where they chose what to show him.

The research questions ...

The research was conducted by Professor Sue Roulstone, Underwood Trust Professor of Language and Communication Impairment, University of the West of England, and Dr Clodagh Miskelly at the Speech and Language Therapy Research Unit, Frenchay Hospital, Bristol.

Activities were initially designed to explore the main research question: **What is it like to be a teenager with a speech and language difficulty?** Gradually the boys’ views and responses shaped the agenda and the nature of the activities. The research question was

gradually reshaped into **What is it like to be me?** As part of the participatory nature of the project, the boys contributed to the workshop planning and what would be appropriate to include in the film.

Some of our activities

About me: The boys developed a number of collages about their lives using pictures from magazines and newspapers, stickers and their own drawings to express: where I live, go to school, what I like to do and watch on TV, people who help, typical school days

'Big Brother' diary room: the boys constructed a 'dairy room' from chairs, cushions, drapes and blackouts. They brought objects from home to talk about and planned questions to ask each other. They took turns to act as cameraman, director, interviewer, and interviewee.

Camera missions: Each boy was given a stills camera to take home with a mission to fulfill before the following workshop. Using the camera they were asked to capture: a day in your life, a tour of your bedroom, what makes you happy, sad, angry, laugh. The photos were processed before the next workshop when the boys interviewed each other to find out about the photos.

Storyboards: Each boy made their own storyboard about something that happened in school. For example, one boy had won a certificate, another did well at cricket, and third drew a cartoon of his ideal school day which involved going to school, having his lunch and coming home again. This was expanded into more open storytelling – using storyboards, comic strips or improvisation that the boys then presented to the others.

Animation and shadow puppetry: The boys expressed an interest in animation which was a useful mechanism for telling personal stories while protecting the boys' identities. An animator and puppeteer explored different types of animation and puppetry with the boys. Then in a two-day workshop, the boys created various different animations and shadow puppet shows, which they presented to their parents.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the five boys and their families for taking part in this project. Their interest and commitment, their ideas and views have made the film possible, exciting and challenging. We are greatly indebted to them.

We would also like to express our thanks to: Afacic for their help in setting up the project, to Lesley Hemmings for all her support in the planning and running of the workshops, to the Brook Lapping team for taking on this project with such sensitivity and interest, particularly Stephen Wilkinson and Rachel Krish, to Tom Dalton our excellent film director and editor who has captured the themes and ideas in this film.

A full report of this is available at www.speech-therapy.org.uk

Further information for families of young people with speech, language and communication difficulties is available at www.afasic.org.uk