

**The School of Sociology and Social Policy  
The University of Leeds**

**Friendships – Understandings and  
Misunderstandings.**

**Is there scope for the discovery of  
commonality and the development of  
mutual respect between disabled and non-  
disabled children and young people?**

**An investigation into the opinions,  
attitudes, perceptions and awareness, of  
the disabling factors affecting disabled  
children and young people's access to  
leisure settings, by non-disabled children  
and young people.**

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## **Abstract**

There is an inherent problem in addressing the issue of disabling factors involved in the inclusion of disabled children into mainstream leisure activities – it seems this issue has only been viewed from one side. The disabled children have been consulted, their views have been heard and documented into a variety of forms in order for others to hear their voices and learn from their experiences. These efforts have been an important step in the journey towards inclusion, both at an individual and group level for those involved and for those non-disabled people who have been influenced by the products of their work.

However the other side of the debate should surely be the views of the non-disabled children. This is an area of research which is under researched within leisure and only partially addressed within the inclusive education debate. In fact, non-disabled young people's opinions do not seem to have been officially acknowledged as existing at all, let alone being recognised as having value in their own right, their opinions and attitudes have not been given a voice. There seems to be a gap between expectation and reality. Non-disabled young people automatically have an effect on the inclusion of disabled young people into inclusive leisure settings, because they are inevitably present.

This research takes a positive view about the potential of hearing the perceptions of the non-disabled young people about the barriers to accessing inclusive leisure provision, as expressed by disabled young people and within the social model of disability. This research gives an avenue to hear non-disabled young people's views. It hopes to open up the debate for further research in this area, to further the inclusion of disabled young people in a more positive and mutually empowering way, promoting equal regard and respect for each others views and opinions leading to better understanding of each other and recognising their similarities, valuing their differences and concentrating upon their commonalities.

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Abstract

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# **Chapter 1.**

## **Introduction**

The views of non-disabled children from a social model perspective about the disabling barriers within leisure settings are underexplored; this research looks at these issues. The interactions of the disabled and non-disabled children in leisure settings are key to consider if disabled children are to be fully included. The inclusion of disabled children and young people into leisure settings is high on the agenda according to the policies and laws which are currently in place. Internationally the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) sets out rights and freedoms which are basic for all human beings. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) Articles 15 and 31 specify the child's right to meet other children and young people, to join groups, organisations and activities and to relax and play. Articles 12, 17 and 23 also directly relate to inclusion stating children's opinion should be heard and considered; they should receive information and be supported to be active in their community. More recently the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD,

2006), which became law in the UK on 08.06.09, developed this further by addressing the need to remove barriers, which stop the independence and inclusion, socially, of disabled children in Articles 3, 9, 19, 20 and 26 (Lansdown, 2009)

These overriding international principles are now part of UK and English law in The Human Rights Act (1998), the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA, 1995) and the Disability Equality Duty (DED, 2006). (Kids, 2008) The DDA and DED place duties on statutory services to adjust and change to include disabled young people but more specifically to *promote equality*, including *eliminating harassment* and *promoting positive attitudes* towards disabled children and young people. (EDCM, 2008:7) The Children's Act (2004) requires local authorities to publish a Children and Young People's Plan; the National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services - Standard 8 (DH, 2004: 8), addresses the needs of disabled children and young people and those with complex health needs, and states that it "promotes their inclusion and their ability to live as ordinary a life as possible through effective partnerships" Finally the UK government's commitment to *all* children accessing 'positive activities' is seen in Section 507B of the Education Act

1996 (DCSF, 2008), and the Ten-year Youth Strategy (HM Treasury and DCSF, 2007) which also looks to transform leisure opportunities, activities and support services for *all* young people.

However the reality of accessing leisure opportunities, with the aim of having relationships and making friends, for most of the estimated 770,000 disabled children in the UK (Contact a Family, 2009), is that it is still not available to them. This research is placed within the social model of disability (Oliver, 1996) which recognises that societal attitudes are one of the barriers to disabled children accessing leisure opportunities. Society is seen as being at fault and each person is living within this disabling society. (Swain et al, 2003:2 cited in Murray 2004:26) Taking this point further, each member of the disabling society is therefore responsible for sustaining or changing the way it operates.

There have been a number of studies and reports where disabled children and young people have been asked to identify the disabling factors which create a barrier to their inclusion into leisure activities, that is from the social model view, notably work by Murray (2002 and 2004), EDCM (2008) and The Children's Society (2008). The opinions of non-disabled children have been

sought about disability and *impairment*, that is from an individualistic, or medical model viewpoint in the past (eg Lewis, 1995) concentrating on the disabled child as the 'problem' due to the "functional limitations or psychological losses" (Oliver, 1996:32) which are part of the individual. There has also been an emphasis on looking at children within educational settings.

The main aims of this study are to investigate the opinions, attitudes and awareness of non-disabled children and young people, of the disabling factors, which affect disabled children and young people's access to inclusive leisure activities and to assess the impact of the exploratory use of some extra resources, (which are part of a resource developed by The Children's Society) to extend non-disabled children's understanding of the disabling barriers identified by disabled children.

In order to start to examine these aims some clear objectives for the research were identified. These were

- to listen to non-disabled young people's understanding of the terms 'disabled'/ 'disability'
- to identify non-disabled young people's experiences of disabled young people accessing leisure activities.

- to ascertain non-disabled young people's awareness of the disabling factors which have been identified by disabled young people and which can act as a barrier to them accessing leisure activities of their choice.
- to record non-disabled young people's response to exposure to some information about disabling factors in disabled young people's lives.

The report is subdivided into five chapters, following this chapter which sets the scene for the research, Chapter 2 will look at disabled children's perception and feelings about accessing leisure and what is actually meant by 'inclusion'; focus will then be on research about children's lives, their attitudes and prejudices, relationships, friendships and group dynamics, finally looking at how bullying and resentment play a part. Chapter 3 presents the researchers' theoretical standpoints, choice of approach and methodologies and details of data collection followed by the strategy for analysis and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 analyses the data, primarily segregated according to the research objectives, but then subdivided within those according to specific themes which emerged within the investigation. Chapter 5 concludes the research study by pulling together the theoretical

review and the expressed attitudes and perceptions of participants.

The Bibliography is followed by the Appendix which includes the resources used, as indicated in the methodology.

The research hopes to show that the opinions, attitudes and awareness of the non-disabled young people reveal understandings and misunderstandings which will be shown to be worth exploring in more depth in future research to help develop the agenda for intervention to enable the inclusion of disabled children.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Exploration of Children's Social Interactions**

To contextualize the research topic a number of areas of literature and research will now be examined. The meaning of leisure and inclusion for disabled young people, and the barriers as identified by them will be briefly analysed. An exploration of the attitudes and prejudice and the effects of some interventions will then be discussed. Relationships, friendships and group dynamics will then be explored, followed by looking at bullying and resentment which is the final area for consideration in this chapter.

Reviewing the existing literature reveals this as an underexplored area within the discourses around disability. The social experiences and attitudes of children within a school environment have been the focus of literature and research carried out so far and has been analysed predominantly in terms of non-disabled children's reactions to disabled children's impairments. The implications of these studies are significant but limited, as Beckett (2009:14) rightly points out they are not from the perspective of the Social Model, "not about *disability as a form of social oppression*".

## **Disabled children and young people - Leisure and Inclusion**

Disabled children and young people have repeatedly expressed their main interest in accessing leisure as a way of meeting friends (Mitchell and Sloper, 2001 cited in Evans and Plumridge, 2007) and to have 'mutually enjoyable relationships'. (Murray, 2002:19) Disappointingly though, non-disabled children's perception of inclusive leisure was that it was for disabled people. (Murray, 2002)

The meaning of inclusion is not to be taken for granted within leisure settings as it can have an accepted meaning which is not shared by all involved. Three different 'interpretations' of inclusive services have been identified within the recent summary of the C4EO Disability Progress map (2009:4) The first of these, 'pseudo-inclusion', integration, is when disabled and non-disabled children attend the same activity but no active encouragement or support for participation is given; 'active-inclusion' is when disabled and non-disabled children, with specific planning and resourcing for participation are enabled to take part in an activity together; the third category is 'opportunity inclusion', segregated activities, for disabled children who are grouped together according to ability

levels. Further to these three, another category has been identified as 'separate provision' by Alison John and Associates ([www.alisonjohn.com](http://www.alisonjohn.com)). This is distinguished from 'opportunity inclusion' because the disabled young people their group themselves, it is not run by the professional adults. Separate provision will involve a group of disabled young people choosing to meet, in a similar way that other minority groups will meet and they will develop their own agenda. (YP-in, 2008:9) The researcher identifies with 'active – inclusion', hence referred to simply as inclusion.

### **Barriers to inclusion**

Unfortunately, even though disabled children have identified for themselves, that they want to be able to choose their own activities, where to go and with whom, (Murray, 2002) they do not often have the same opportunities of choice and friendship as non-disabled children for a number of reasons. Most teenagers will meet at each other's houses or whilst taking part in sport or out at shopping centres, friendships will be naturally developing, however disabled children do not often have these opportunities, (Cavet, 1998 cited in Connors and Stalker, 2007:26) they may have few, if

any, local friends particularly if they travel to a special school. (Connors and Stalker, 2007) An extra barrier for disabled children in schools was having a support worker, constantly supervising them in close proximity, and thereby inhibiting friendships. (Murray, 2002) There would be no reason for this to be different within a leisure setting. Evans and Plumridge (2007) found that some providers of activities felt that the effect of peer pressure increased as children grew older, resulting in there being less likelihood of disabled children being involved in the integrated activities that were provided. Older disabled children especially, have expressed high levels of boredom. (Connors and Stalker, 2007) Leisure for disabled children and young people is unfortunately also often seen as an educational or learning opportunity to develop skills (Murray, 2002) rather than as a fun activity for its own sake.

The barriers for disabled children to access leisure activities are numerous and have been categorised in different ways by different organisations. The C4EO progress map summary (2009:5) relates barriers to the child, the family, the service, lack of information and *lastly* (ed's emphasis) to the environment which is explained as including access, transport, childcare and attitudes of others.

Categorisation of barriers have by other organisations, especially

when disabled children were involved in the process, generally followed the social model of disability and find attitudes, access, communication and facilities are the main barriers for disabled young people's access to leisure (The Children's Society, 2008) similarly, attitudes, access and transport were identified by the disabled young people involved in "Going Places". (ECDM, 2008)

## **Attitudes**

The social model view of disability views one of the major barriers to disabled people having equal rights in our society as being the attitudes of non-disabled people towards disabled people.

Discovering and trying to understand the formulation and perceptions of disabling attitudes by non-disabled young people can help in providing baseline information for future planning and encouragement of more positive relationships.

Attitudes are not part of, or linked to a particular person but to a much wider system, to sets of attitudes and a variety of relationships which exist around disabled people. (Dartington, Miller and Gwynne, 1981:118) Children's reactions to difference can be seen at a very young age, some noting that "a particular

group is somehow hateworthy". (Allport 1954:307 cited in Carrington and Troyna 1988:23) Some studies found that children as young as four years old were noticing and *responding* negatively to peers who were different from themselves and choosing to spend time with their non-disabled peers. (Sigelman, Miller and Whitworth, 1986, and Stoneman, 1993, Guralnick, 1997 cited in Han et al 2006) Different impairments have also been shown to affect non-disabled children's attitudes towards disabled children in different ways. (Richardson et al, 1961)

Attitudes and perceptions of others have been considered to be learned from others. (Allport,1954) More recent research found that cognition, emotion and behaviour were all involved in non-disabled people's attitudes towards disabled people (Siperstein and Bak, 1986; Triandis, 1971 cited in Innes and Diamond 1999), especially their expressed prejudicial attitudes as they mature into adolescence. (Aboud 2005:322)

Attitudes, understanding and knowledge about people with mental retardation amongst older non-disabled children suggests that although the 14-15 year olds may seem to be no more knowledgeable than 13 -14 year olds, the younger group were

more 'forthcoming' in expressing their feelings of embarrassment or discomfort and to openly speak about their worries, whereas the older group were much more careful about trying to match their answers to what they thought the researchers wanted to hear.

(Kyle and Davies, 1991)

Non-disabled children do seem to have an awareness of saying and doing the 'correct thing'. In an early study by Richardson, non-disabled children were found to qualify their judgements of physical impairments, with statements about how equally nice disabled children and non-disabled children are whilst at the same time also admitting if pressed how uncomfortable they feel with disabled children and do not know what to say. (Richardson et al, 1961) A study of non-disabled young people's attitudes towards disabled children in a secondary school found they demonstrated kindness, but on the lines of pity, embarrassment and discomfort towards disabled children. They also had expectations about disabled children being violent, having seizures or exhibiting bizarre behaviours. They knew they should be sociable with disabled people, but were worried about how to react, in case they got it wrong and said they hadn't really thought about the subject

before and were thinking again about ‘their own current prejudices and misconceptions’. (Kyle and Davies, 1991:106)

Allport identified prejudices as prejudgements which are irreversible even when new information is presented (1954:9), these negative attitudes which develop early on in life can be more resistant to change. (Stoneman, 1993 cited in Innes and Diamond 1999) Using qualitative methods of observation and open-ended interviews among young children revealed little obvious prejudice (Holmes, 1995) although this had been the way that Allport worked and formed his opinions. The more recent research regarding prejudice could be said to be explaining this as it was found that children were not usually expressing prejudice via “anger, hostility and verbal taunts”, but as “suspicion, fear, sadness and disapproval and expressed as avoidance, social exclusion and negative evaluation.” (Aboud, 2005:314)

Continuing the cycle of prejudice can be through direct ‘transfer’ of “parental words, emotions, and ideas to children through learning and conformity” therefore producing an environment of “fertile ground for prejudicial emotions” (Aboud, 2005:310) However even though this might all sound very negative and suggest that there is

nothing that can be done to dismantle prejudice, it is encouraging that other studies have focused upon how attitudes can be changed. Simple 'exposure' to disabled peers is seen by some as being a way to help non-disabled children's attitudes towards an understanding of disabled children (Innes and Diamond, 1999) and others who are different from them. (Peck et al 1992, cited in Innes and Diamond, 1999) Child care practices and both positive and negative attitudes towards disabled children from parents, teachers, family members or members of the same community act as models for children's attitudes (Triandis, 1972, cited in Han et al 2006, Innes and Diamond, 1999), and influence interactions within mixed classroom settings. (Okagaki et al, 1998 in Innes and Diamond 1999)

Adult's roles in changing the young children's perceptions include explicit teaching about difference, including impairments. (Stoneman et al, 1996, cited in Innes and Diamond, 1999; Lieber et al. 1998 in Innes and Diamond 1999) They should therefore be modelling positive attitudes in a variety of ways to encourage 'respect for and sensitivity to individual differences'. (Favazza and Odom, 1997, cited in Han et al 2006; ) Reflecting this research, the promotion of positive attitudes has also been highlighted within

DED guidance for schools (downloadable at [teachernet.gov.uk](http://teachernet.gov.uk)) which recommends “staff modelling respectful attitudes to disabled pupils, staff and parents”(page 15) The importance of considering non-disabled children’s attitudes towards disabled children is of interest in itself but more specifically of interest in order to see how they will affect children’s mutual relationships and friendships.

### **Relationships/friendships**

It has already been noted that disabled children want to be accepted and to attend a wide range of leisure activities of their choice, most importantly though, the activities are a way of establishing friendships. Goffman said the understanding of stigma was all about the connections or friendships between children, not their individual characteristics. (1968, cited in James, 1993:2) The roles of all the children involved in relationship building should not be underestimated (Prout and James, 1990, cited in James, 1993). The culture of childhood in the UK has resulted in them being seen as “other than adults”, (Hockey and James, 1993 cited in James, 1993:16) parents excusing children, seeing them as in need of protection and training, not responsible for their actions, with no autonomy, however they are seen to be active in socially excluding

some children, some of their encounters resulting in confrontation which are power struggles. (James, 1993) It can be assumed by adults that children's relationships or friendships are the same as adults, with the same values of trust and intimacy, but they are different and seen as being part of a "particular social world". (Paine, 1974 cited in James, 1993:203)

The concept of friendship varies at different ages and stages in a child's life, by adolescence a range of characteristics including appearance being part of their choice of friends and used as a way of measuring or judging other characteristics. Changes in cognitive development can shape the way 'friendships and peer relationships are made' and the importance of physical attractiveness. (James, 1993; Erwin 1993:65) Therefore the culture of friendships is more than another's appearance, more than attitudes to impairments. Children's perceptions of blame, personal responsibility for actions and understanding of psychological problems can have an important influence upon relationships and may be very important if young people do not understand some behaviours exhibited by disabled young people. Attribution theory sees the responses of those who observe certain behaviours being linked to their understanding of responsibility for those actions. A

child may be socially rejected and reacted to with anger if behaving aggressively or alternatively chosen as a friend and pitied if exhibiting withdrawn behaviour. (Weiner, 1993 cited in Hennessey et al, 2007) Increased attribution of perceived responsibility for negative behaviours is directly correlated to increased negative responses created, resulting in less likelihood of being welcomed by their peers. (Juvonen, 1991 cited in Hennessey et al 2007) Psychological essentialism suggests other's views of exhibited behaviours as an external sign of part of the child's character. It is a view more commonly utilised by younger children when the exhibited behaviour is aggressive. (Giles, 2003 cited in Hennessey et al, 2007)

Unsurprisingly some children are more likely to be accepted by their peers and to have more friendships. The frequency and type of social interaction and judgements of whom others say are their friends have all been identified as patterns of social competence. Children can find themselves being actively disliked and socially rejected or not particularly liked and socially isolated by others. (Furman, 1984) The children's sociometric status is identified in some studies as being reliant upon their 'physical attractiveness, intelligence and expertise as well as by social behaviour'. (Asher,

Oden and Gottman, 1977 cited in Furman, 1984:5) Problems in forming and maintaining relationships can be as a result of a number of reasons, however there is a danger when judging children's ways of relating to others as being good or bad that emphasis is put upon the 'skills' of the individual – perhaps suggesting that some children, including disabled children, will need to be cured or improved (Tesch, 1983 in Erwin 1993) in some way in order to conform and gain more friends and that there is no responsibility accepted by others. It is important to note that some children may prefer to be alone whilst others may not know how to start up and maintain a friendship. (Erwin 1993)

Fox and Boulton (2005) found that a lack of social skills was often given by the child, other children and their teacher as the reason for being bullied, which will be looked at later. These relationship problems may include previous experience, the specifics of the relationship and the attributes of each child. This individualistic view of the disabled child as being the one who is at fault and therefore needing to change is redressed slightly when Erwin points out that although an adverse affect upon friendship may occur if a child has a 'physical or mental handicap' he also suggests that the other child's values , attitudes and behaviour in

the relationship plays a part in whether there is a difficulty due to the child's impairment (1993:200) This view relates to the social model of seeing a child's disability as due to barriers in society , one of which is other's attitudes and treatment of them. Cumming and Cumming (1972) go even further to suggest stigma being not only held by the person who bears it, but as being inseparable from the feelings and behaviour of others who support it by their actions or attitudes – seeing them as interlinked - each being the cause and effect of the other.

### **Group Dynamics**

This complex interplay between disabled and non-disabled people has also been highlighted by Tregaskis (2004), again seeing disability as being far from a static concept, but as different according to varied settings and situations, disabled people being viewed quite differently according to whether they are in a group, or interacting with others individually. This is very pertinent when considering the views of young people towards each other as peer groups and belonging to one group or another is of particular importance for teenagers (Blackburn, 1990) Segregated educational systems are felt by some to help to create “ an

atmosphere of mutual fear and potential for misunderstanding” (Middleton, 1999:5) as they limit the possibilities of disabled and non-disabled children to meet. This generalised attitude towards a certain category of people is seen a ‘characteristic of prejudice’. Each disabled person having their own identity of ‘self (disabled) and environment (handicapping)’ as well as a group identity ‘through which the individual is forced to peer and wave vigorously if he wants to be recognised as himself’. (Dartington et al, 1981:124)

Allport (1954) suggested that in general people prefer to be with people who are the same as themselves and stay apart from other groups. Once in a group there may be ‘few channels of communication’, differences can easily become exaggerated and reasons for difference are easily misunderstood. Limited opportunities for disabled and non-disabled young people to meet does little to combat what Allport described as progressive feelings which can lead onto ‘genuine’ and ‘imaginary conflicts’ (1954:19) The group will have a collective identity, this would have an effect upon an individual’s views and their ability to change their minds as they may risk exclusion if not conforming. (Allport 1954:39) The pressures exerted by in-groups are strongest with

children between six and thirteen years old. (Costanzo and Shaw, 1966 cited in Aboud, 2005) When a group of disabled people meet a group of non-disabled people stronger feelings of 'us and them' are produced, than when an individual from each group meets together. (Dartington et al 1981). Similarly Tregaskis found an disabled individual received equal service to non-disabled , whilst a group of disabled accessing the same facility became 'objects of negative stereotyping' and were portrayed as 'other' and seen as 'frightening, different and requiring separate leisure provision' (2004: 138)

## **Bullying and Resentment**

These forms of treating people according to which group they belong to can be taken further in some circumstances and develop into bullying, which involves an imbalance of power, the victims being unable to defend themselves. (Olweus, 1999, cited in Smith, 2000). Disabled children are more likely to be bullied and victimised than other young people on an individual basis, (NAS, 2006; Dawkins, 1996 cited in Smith, 2000) Mencap's survey of children and young people with a learning disability revealed 82%

of them had been bullied, this was said to be twice as likely as other young people. (Mencap, 2007)

Misunderstandings, due to mis-information can occur and result in disabled children being bullied and in some cases bullying others due to lack of understanding. Liz Carnell from Bullying Online said

One of the problems is that children with SEN may behave in a way that is difficult for other children to understand and they can be bullied as a result of this or actually be accused of bullying.

Special Children, 2006

The types of bullying which take place for all children and young people are varied. (Smith, 2000) Disabled children will be bullied in the same ways, but some extra tactics may be also be used, when looking more specifically at play and leisure time, including getting disabled children to do something which perhaps they do not recognise as something they should not do. (Dept. for Children, Schools and Families, 2009:7) Siblings of disabled children have said they frequently witnessed 'negative reactions to their brother or sister' by all members of the community and in numerous

settings, in the form of 'name calling, staring, patronising remarks and misplaced sympathy'. (Stalker and Connors, 2004)

Subsequent research by Connors and Stalker (2007: 28) with disabled children aged between 7 and 15 years old found that the disabled children themselves had similarly identified 'insensitivity' towards them including staring, being talked down to, inappropriate comments and behaviour and overt sympathy from people they did not know. These reactions to disabled young people are examples of 'barriers to being' as described earlier (Thomas, 1999, cited in Stalker and Connors, 2004 and Connors and Stalker 2007).

Misunderstandings can also lead to negative evaluations and generalisations about disabled young people to feelings of resentment "resulting from disability being seen as an avenue to better, rather than equal opportunities" (EENET, URL 21.07.09)

Extra help given to pupils in school can lead to stigmatisation (Dawkins 1996, cited in Smith 2000) and sometimes prejudicial attitudes. Very few studies were available concerning this area , but some studies have shown siblings of disabled children have felt resentment and jealousy towards their disabled siblings (Evans et al, 2001) because there was extra attention given to the disabled child as well as special treatment. This may include

allowances being made so the disabled child 'gets away' with certain behaviours which when coupled with lower expectations when activities and jobs were being carried out also created anger, jealousy and resentment (Novita Psychology, 2007; Sibs, undated) Jealousy and resentment have also been found to be a reaction to a sibling's perception of extra time being given to the disabled child, not only by a parent but also from professionals. (Sibs, undated)

## **Summary**

This chapter has looked at the research concerning the intricacies of children's relationships. The social world of children and young people is a complex interaction of learned behaviours, reactions to situations and settings and responding according to peer expectations. The next Chapter will explain how the research was formulated and carried out.

## **Chapter 3.**

### **Data Generation**

The research methods carried out for this investigation will now be examined in some detail, starting with the approach and methodology. This will be followed by the strategy, design and procedures which were used, discussion will then focus upon the relevant ethical issues which were addressed which will lead on to a reflexive account of the research experience as a whole.

#### **Context**

Recognition of the researcher's views about the nature of knowledge illustrated through their ontological and epistemological approaches shapes the end results and value of the findings and therefore needs to be explained to locate the study within the current discourses. (Porter and Lacey, 2005) The inclusion of disabled young people into leisure settings is unable to exist without non-disabled young people. Ontology is the study of reality. (Hart, 2005) My ontological position is that I believe non-disabled young people will have their own opinions and attitudes

regarding the disabling factors in disabled children's lives and that non-disabled young people's "knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences and interfaces are meaningful properties of the social reality". (Mason, 2002:63, cited in Taira, 2007)

Epistemology is "the theory of knowledge, that is, theory about what is true and how we come to believe that knowledge is true" (Gilbert, 2008: 507). Working with disabled children for the last six years, helping them access mainstream leisure activities of their choice, I have witnessed, and worked to break down barriers which inhibit disabled children's human right to freely access leisure opportunities. I have increasingly felt that the views, opinions and attitudes of the non-disabled young people within these inclusive environments are not being considered. Non-disabled young people have been seen as the 'gatekeepers' of integration within school environments (Allan, 1995), this could also be true within leisure settings. I have therefore come to a belief that non-disabled young people's views and understandings of the disabling factors which exist for disabled young people, as understood within the social model, need to be heard. This is my epistemological position.

The epistemological approach chosen involves data collection from non-disabled young people in order to illicit interesting, unheard opinions, attitudes and reactions to produce general conclusions and is therefore an inductive approach. (Blaikie, 2000) This research is not looking to prove a hypothesis or theory, so not a deductive approach, (Bryman: 2004) but to expand this area of study, to explore and inform the disablism debate through investigation of the way non-disabled young people view the social experiences of disabled young people. (Gilbert, 2008) Although some inductive research is expected to produce a theory, this is not always the case, although some theory can be used as a background to the study. (Bryman, 2004) An abductive approach involves “the views of ‘insiders’” this was therefore not felt to be an appropriate approach for this research. (Blaikie, 1993 cited in Beckett, 2005)

### **Choice of Methodology**

Choice of methodology for the research considered that this research appears to be innovative. Beckett (2009) has considered similar issues within educational settings, but no previous research has been uncovered by the researcher which specifically

addresses the *opinions of non-disabled young people in a potentially inclusive leisure setting*. There is therefore a clear need for investigative work to contribute towards the formation of new theory, indicating qualitative methods should be used which can probe “beneath surface appearances”. (Bryman, 2004: 280) Close involvement with the participants, open questions, limited structure and flexibility in the chosen approach allow the participants to express themselves and reveal unexpected aspects to the researcher. This allows a deeper understanding which would not be possible if a quantitative method was used. (Bryman, 2004)

The researcher was however mindful that as the main ‘instrument’ of the collection of the data there is an element of subjectivity in qualitative research. (Bryman, 2004) In this investigation, the participants were not known to the researcher prior to being interviewed. The only previous meeting which had taken place during the previous week was when all potential participants had been introduced to the research topic and consent forms had been issued to any young people who showed an interest so they could make an informed choice as to whether to be involved. This meant that unlike some qualitative research it was not felt that in this case any relationships had started to build, rather the emphasis was

upon building rapport with the young people (Punch, 2002) to put them at ease so they would freely express their opinions.

The response of the participants to the researcher will have a much greater impact upon the process during qualitative research than quantitative, because of the interaction which is taking place, (Bryman, 2004) The researcher is a middle aged, female, interviewing young people between the ages of 11 and 18 years old, in their own youth clubs and was very aware of being out of place and that age, gender and personality have the potential to elicit responses felt to be socially acceptable by the young people. (Fielding and Thomas, 2008 in Gilbert, 2008) The power imbalance of being an adult interviewing young people was not underestimated. In an attempt to alleviate this and to help build rapport with the young people practised skills from the researcher's professional role (Punch, 2002b), were used, but introductions described the researcher as student in need of the young people's help for a piece of work being carried out for their studies. The young people responded well to this approach and the evaluation sheets (Appendix 10) which were completed at the end and the comments they made confirmed that the non-disabled young people had enjoyed the opportunity to express their views

and opinions. The behaviour and experience of the interviewer and conduct of the interview were carefully considered and the format was revised until the researcher was comfortable with the format and props to maximise the quality, with regard to 'rate and extensiveness' (Fielding and Thomas, 2008:256 in Gilbert 2008) of the responses.

### **Focus Groups**

The use of focus groups as the methodological tool, to interview the non-disabled young people, was primarily decided after considering the context of the research and the need for the young people to want to take part in their free time and potentially enjoy the experience. It was also important to be able to set up, interview and leave quite quickly as the interviewing process would be intruding upon the youth clubs activities and occupying a room with some of the young people. (Robson, 2002; Dawson and Manderson, 1993) It was felt that a focus group would feel less artificial as a medium to discuss their views than a 1:1 interview. (Willig, 2008) The youth workers and young people did not know the researcher so practically and ethically it would have been unwise to interview the young people individually and group

interviews would eliminate the need for them to use literacy skills, would empower and stimulate all participants to take part in what could have been a difficult topic for some to speak about, with the potential to encourage quieter members to take part. (Robson, 2002) The flexibility of the approach would allow for discovery of previously undiscovered attitudes and opinions (Dawson and Manderson, 1993) , whilst allowing participants to challenge, agree or disagree with each other, perhaps resulting in 'jointly constructed meanings' as some participants attitudes were changed and reformed, providing rich data. (Willig, 2008:31) This development of the non-disabled young people's ideas would give a broad view of their opinions, (Cronin, 2008 in Gilbert, 2008) witnessing their interactions also being very important as an 'insight into group norms' (Lewis, 1992:414) and of how young people can change their opinions to 'consensus views' (Lewis, 1992:416) also called 'group think' by Jarvis (1982 cited in Bryman, 2004:359)

There are a number of practical disadvantages to using focus groups, including the potential for a dominant speaker to take over, for conflicts to take place between participants (Robson, 2002) and the emergence of a group view resulting in repression of some

individual's views. (Asch 1951 cited in Bryman, 2004) Linked with this is the production of culturally expected views which are more likely to happen within a focus group than when research is carried out by using individual interviews. (Morgan 2002 cited in Bryman 2004) The data is also recognised as being very time consuming to transcribe and difficult to analyse. (Bryman, 2004)

### **Research Practicalities**

Finding the sample group of non-disabled young people involved a decision to approach youth clubs which generally run a more relaxed range of activities where young people choose whether to engage with an activity, rather than more formal uniformed organisations or sport's clubs which run more structured activities. The pilot focus group was carried out at a local youth club but in order to avoid interviewing non-disabled young people known to the researcher in a professional capacity, which could influence responses, the rest of the groups were conducted in another part of the county. Two visits to each club were arranged, the first as described earlier, to speak to the young people who attended, and inviting them to take part. In one group the youth leader allocated the job of finding participants for the focus group to a youth club

member, but generally the researcher asked anyone who was willing to listen. If they agreed they were each given an information sheet and consent form (Appendix 1) and were either issued with consent forms to take home for their parents to sign (Appendix 2) or were invited to write their address on an envelope which was posted to their parents with the consent form enclosed. The following week those who wanted to be involved would return with the necessary consents. This opportunity or convenience sampling method of finding participants for the research is a non-probability sampling method (Straker, undated) and was chosen as it allowed contact with a reasonable number of young people who would be seen in groups, for the reasons mentioned earlier. Using a random selection of non-disabled young people, as in probability sampling, who are representative of the general population is generally viewed as being more beneficial for research. However due to the size, time and the financial realities of completing a small research project with the aim of acquiring a broad idea of the opinions of some non disabled young people without the need for statistical analysis of findings (Straker undated), convenience sampling was considered to be the most appropriate, and is 'frequently' used for social research, according to Bryman (2004:100).

Acquiring the necessary consent forms was problematic and was a major hurdle for participation, but not uncommon when using focus groups. (Bryman, 2004) Spare consent forms were issued to some young people and extra trips to see parents and gain their consent were made to enable some young people to take part. Signed consent forms from both the parents/carers and the young people were a necessary procedure from an ethical point of view for all young people who were under 18. (BSA, 2002) One youth club was visited several times, finally resulting in no participants from that particular club taking part, as consent forms were not completed. The four clubs visited were quite different in their approach – two of the clubs had staff who worked at both clubs, who were concerned that young people would not volunteer to take part. They insisted on offering free pizza to young people who agreed to participate. This incentive secured a number of young people at both clubs. Participants in the other groups were offered a choice of gel pens by the researcher, which they used to fill out their evaluation sheet as a thank you gesture.

The researcher had hoped to have five or six young people in each focus group, seen as a good number for discussion to take place, (Cronin, 2008) but in practise the groups ranged in size from three

to six. In one club seven young people offered to take part, they were split into two groups according to age. This decision had been made after observation of the dynamics of another group, when the older three males in a focus group of five had dominated the discussion and the younger females in the group added little other than nods of agreement. In total 19 young people took part in 5 focus groups in 4 different youth clubs. The age range varied between 11 and 18 years old; there were 9 females and 10 males. Details of the settings, clubs and participants are included in Appendix 13, some of the youth clubs were close to special schools, and two of the focus groups were held in the same youth club on an RAF base.

### **Focus Group Agenda**

The agenda for each focus group consisted of welcoming all the young people to the group, and showing them and talking them through a plan for the session (Appendix 3). They were thanked for offering their time to help with the project and again shown the recording device and reminded that all contributions would be recorded and transcribed, but would be made anonymous. The group were reassured that they were not expected to provide an

answer or to speak about each of the six questions (Appendix 4) but they were asked to listen to each other and to try to speak one at a time and to give each other a chance to speak.

The first 'question' was an 'ice-breaker', starting with the researcher, each participant shared their name, age and named a toy/doll/game which they have enjoyed. Six questions were then asked, all young people were given the opportunity to contribute after each question, without any pressure, if they decided not to answer. Three visual and auditory prompts were then introduced, one by one and opinions about each gathered. The first involved using a section of a DVD which was a 'Rap' sung by disabled young people about the way they felt about people's attitudes towards them. (The Children's Society, 2008) (Appendix 5) The researcher unfortunately experienced some technical difficulties with the first two groups, so used the planned alternative, which was a number of statements made by disabled young people about attitudes towards them (Appendix 6), but the DVD was shown to subsequent groups. The next part followed with the researcher reading out and showing them a card printed with a number of concerns raised by disabled young people about access to leisure activities. (The Children's Society, 2008) (Appendix 7)

The final part involved the researcher showing the group some examples of alternative communication methods – Braille and widget (Appendix 8 and 9). The non-disabled young people were invited to comment after being shown each of these items. Finally the group were asked to comment again on two of the original questions asked of them considering the new information which had been presented. Finally the young people were invited to make any further comments.

When the group had finished the planned questions and activities they were thanked and in all but one group agreed to complete an evaluation sheet about their involvement in the group (Appendix 10). Each young person was given a personalised ‘thank you’ certificate, in an envelope, signed by the researcher, again thanking them for their time and valuable contribution. (Appendix 12)

### **Strategy for Analysis**

All the focus groups interviews were recorded and as much as possible was transcribed, as accurately as the quality of the recordings allowed. The transcripts were read through a number of

times and manually analysed to identify key points and common and contrasting themes between the focus groups. (Hart, 2007; Seidal, 1998)

## **Ethics**

The British Sociological Associations Ethical Code of Practise (2002) was consulted. The use of information sheets and consent forms for all young people and their parents or carers were a crucial part of the research. The researcher was very aware of their responsibility to protect the physical, social and psychological well being of any of the young people spoken to, whether or not they agreed to take part in a focus group. Concern was raised over one young person, who after showing initial enthusiasm about taking part and identifying himself to some of his peers in the group, as having a disabling condition which would affect him in the future, withdrew from all further contact at subsequent meetings. The researcher raised this concern with the senior youth worker who said he would deal with the situation.

Discussion took place with the youth workers both before and after the focus groups had taken place and the researcher stayed at the

club after the interviews and invited the participants to share any concerns with them or the youth leaders. All participants also had the researcher's mobile number. Risk to personal safety was a major concern, especially with regard to safeguarding issues; the researcher had an enhanced CRB clearance from their workplace and was never alone with a young person.

In this research the young people were treated with respect and as individuals. Each was informed of the research being carried out, the way the information was to be recorded, transcribed and written up, and how confidentiality would be a priority.

Pseudonyms have been used throughout the research report.

Each participant was given a personalised "thank you" certificate signed by the researcher thanking them for their time and contribution. (Appendix 12) All participants were invited to see the transcript of the focus group they were involved with. (Appendix 14)

## **Upon Reflection**

The researcher for this study was inexperienced and reflecting upon the procedures used has inevitably raised a number of areas

where improvements could be made for future researchers, some of which have been addressed earlier in this chapter. One major difficulty encountered which is associated with working with focus groups was the difficulty in securing fully audible material (Bryman, 2004; Cronin 2008 in Gilbert 2008) this resulted in a large part of group two's interactions being lost.

The researcher feels some participants, particularly those who were quieter, during the discussions, would have welcomed the opportunity to speak individually after the focus group meetings, to express further opinions which may have been stimulated during discussion but which had not been shared in the group, possibly due to more dominant members views being expressed (ref?) This had not been planned and time was not given for this opportunity to take place.

One of the young people told his focus group he went to a special school. He was keen to be involved, and firmly identified as a non-disabled young person. He demonstrated wider awareness of impairment and some disabling factors. The researcher debated as to whether to include his comments and decided to do so with respect for his enthusiastic involvement. The other participants in

his group spoke out disabled young people in a similar way as others, so their input was not negated due to his presence. Only information imparted by the young people themselves has been declared in this study.

## **Summary**

This chapter has explained the theoretical and practical aspects of collecting appropriate information for the research topic, the next chapter will analyse the data generated data.

## **Chapter 4.**

### **Perceptions and Insights.**

The following chapter will illustrate the broad spectrum of opinions and attitudes and feelings which were expressed by the non-disabled young people. The outline of this chapter will follow the four objectives set out for the study. Within these objectives certain themes emerge which in some cases, were expressed at different times during discussion.

#### **Understanding 'disability'.**

The use of the terms 'disabled' and 'disability' was generally interpreted by all of the young people interviewed to mean impairment as described within the social model. Interestingly though during discussions within each focus group the young people showed some awareness of societal and environment barriers. Some explanations of disability were very general; others were more specific about particular impairments. The eldest participant's expressed opinion possibly showed his knowledge of having lived and worked with disabled children and could have reflected some training he had received.

Gordon : It doesn't really mean anything to me 'cos people in my eyes are like everyone's the same you know, whether they've got a disability or not they are still a person and you'd treat them the same way you would anyone else.

In contrast, the youngest participant's comment illustrates the response of a few others whose answers focused upon disabled as inability, due to impairment, the individual model of disability.

Oliver: Yeh, well, like they have like problems, and they can't do stuff.

Some young people spoke about a variety of impairments, whether the particular label was known or not, including one young person referring to and demonstrating twisted upper limbs to explain how disabled young people can have "chicken wings" as arms. Others were more conventional in their explanations.

Pat: In a way someone with autism is disabled, someone who is also like in a wheelchair who's like paralysed or something, they are disabled, so there are different forms.

Jack: she does that hand shaking stuff

Fiona: If someone says so and so is disabled, I always like automatically think of a wheelchair, but sometimes they are not...(…)...they look the same as everybody else, mentally like they can't do something.

Consideration was given to the wording of the question and whether this may have caused a false 'us and them' divide which shaped some responses, as in general when the young people were answering the set questions they spoke about disabled people as a group of others, sometimes even disregarding the disabled people they knew themselves, reflecting Tregaskis's research. (2004) Some of the young people were confused as to which of the people they knew 'qualified' to be called disabled.

Brenda: My brother is disabled, my youngest brother, I'm not joking; he's got something wrong with him. Oh no, sorry it's just Downs Syndrome. Sorry I thought that *was* disabled.

Some of the older young people were not completely clear about what they thought, but were using their own explanations and then developing their ideas, and awareness of disability, reflecting Aboud's research. (2005:322) They used the forum of the focus group to openly discuss, agree and disagree with others in the

group during the discussions. (Willig, 2008:31) Sarah started her explanation by saying that being disabled was “someone with a disability of any kind, mental or physical”, but after hearing some other view points she developed her initial response and added later:

I disagree that it is something that they can't do because even if you are in a wheelchair like that is a disability but you can still go out and play basketball and things like that .....it is mental or physical disability but then just because they've got a disability doesn't mean that they can't do the stuff we can do either.

Roger listened to the rest of the group and then added:

Well I disagree with that because I think they can still do the same things as we can do, but it is a lot harder for them...

#### *More information*

The use of the 'Circle of Friends' have advocated, sharing of information about the behaviour of a focus child to support them within a school environment (Frederickson and Turner, 2003; Barrett and Randall, 2004), interestingly, the topic of wanting to know more about disabled children was raised in two focus groups

by the participants, suggesting accurate information could be helpful for these young people when coming into contact with disabled children. In one of the groups Trevor said he had ADHD, some of the group had not known this and asked for more information. His explanation was: "it means I can go loopy at any time", he was helped out by another member of the group.

Roger: You want more attention sometimes, 'cos I know someone who has got like severe ADHD ...(...)...they get angry a lot like really quickly as well, but they have been learning to keep themselves under control.

This latter point made by Roger concurs with research by Tesch (1983) and Erwin (1993) about individualistic responsibility for social skills. In the other group, after listening to some strong opinions being expressed by others in the group, Isobel, who said very little in her group, added "I don't think we know enough about their conditions, like what they can do".

## **Do disabled children access leisure?**

### *Inclusive leisure*

The young people had limited personal experiences of seeing disabled young people involved in leisure. Two of the young

people were young leaders for a local outdoor activities youth initiative. One of them told us there were a few disabled young people accessing this and that they could do anything they wanted. However when questioned by one of the other young people, it sounded as though accessibility had been restricted.

Gordon: .....just anything from just walking to kayaking, mountain biking and anything like that really anything they want.

Earl: If they've got disabilities, like how can they ride a bike if they are in a wheelchair?

Gordon: Obviously there is some that, a few, that can't go there.

The young people were enthusiastic, if somewhat naïve about disabled children being able to access any sport. Initial lists being modified after someone decided disabled children were unable to kick a ball. One young person said they had seen a disabled young person rollerblading with a 'carer's' help.

The groups seemed to concentrate upon sporting activities, although one of the girls talked of other activities and one group talked about a disabled boy who went to the local special school, who “didn’t dribble” and attended their youth group.

Pat: some people with like some conditions prefer doing art and things where they do quite a lot of drawings and painting and stuff

Jack: he’s like normal and he’s not like, he doesn’t look it

Luke: Yeh he’s got learning disabilities. Its like people with learning disabilities come here and he looks like us and if they don’t look like us they’re tret like outsiders.

Concurring with some research (Allport 1954:307 cited in Carrington and Troyna, 1988:23) the groups position regarding appearances seemed to be agreed as being the most important deciding factor as to whether a young person would be welcomed. Their prejudicial generalisation as discussed by Aboud (2005:314) led them to agree that having a physical impairment results in socially exclusion from their club.

### *Segregated leisure*

A number of the young people mentioned segregated sports for disabled young people, including wheelchair basketball, and the Paralympics, 'disabled' rugby, swimming and scuba diving were also mentioned by individuals. Two of the young people in the same focus group talked about sport as an environment where disabled people could be better than or push themselves more than non-disabled people. One had been impressed by seeing badminton in the Olympics, the other felt sport was a way for them to help escape from their negative feelings about themselves and to build up their self esteem. These feelings reflect some research by Taub and Greer. (2000)

Sarah: ...some of them don't mind that they are in a wheelchair, but some of them might become disabled and you might be quite insecure about what happened to you so you might not want to go out in public at first, so you might concentrate on the sport

Other experiences of disabled adults and young people have been in the community, on the streets and in play parks, none of which sounded as though they had been positive experiences, as will be discussed in the next section.

## **Does anything stop disabled children accessing leisure?**

When asked about what might stop disabled young people accessing activities some interesting insights, especially from the older participants, into disabling barriers were expressed, others spoke more when they had been exposed to extra information later on.

### *Attitudes of others - bullying and intimidation*

Fiona summed up the feelings which were expressed by virtually every participant, at some stage during the focus group discussions that disabled children would be bullied in some way. (E.g. Whitney et al, 1994; Dawkins, 1996 cited in Smith, 2000)

Fiona: They're going to get picked on and they're going to get called names and that's going to stop them going places and doing things that they really want to do but can't 'cos they're scared of other people.

Earl: they can't speak the same as we do...it will stop them coming, it'll run them down 'cos they can't talk as normally as

we do a few people might think its funny.....and it might stop them from coming to places.

Pat: I think if people in themselves were accepting of these people like, yeh, they've got a disability, but get over it kind of attitude, then I think it would be a lot easier for non-disabled and disabled children because if somebody's got a bad attitude towards you if you are disabled you don't feel like you are welcome you don't feel like you want to do it

Some of the younger children also spoke about people being picked on or bullied in more obvious ways including witnessing disabled young people being antagonised to produce predicted behaviours.

Oliver: Could be like at school, people take advantage of them, there's not that much hallway and they might push them about and stuff.

### *Their mental attitude*

Three participants in one of the older groups followed quite a strong individualistic line of thought about the disabled individual's 'mental attitude' being the key to them overcoming barriers and

accessing activities. At this point in the discussion the young people were totally ignoring the constraints an impairment could have on an individual and the environmental barriers in the way.

Sarah : I think they could do any activity, just like us if you put your mind to it I don't think that they actually have stuff that they can't do obviously they are disabled in different forms but they can do different stuff but I think anyone that puts their mind to it can do anything really.

Trevor: It's their mental barriers about what they think is physically possible and what is actually physically possible

### *Risk to themselves and others*

There was an awareness of the young people in one group of the tragedy of disabled young people potentially being a hazard. This led to discussion of how they should be excluded both for the benefit of themselves and others in the group; this was an interesting position that would sit firmly within the individual model of disability.

Sarah: if it was like a mental disability and they might have affects of their disability say they had a disability which meant

they had like seizures or something like that, that might stop, prevent them from coming to certain activities just in case anything might happen to them

Pat: But people don't allow disabled people to do it like with non-disabled children because they are not just a risk to themselves but, a risk to other people...(.....)...but that's unfair on them and stuff but you have got to think about the bigger picture kind of thing.

*Lack of access, poor facilities, own impairments*

One young man, again one of the older ones involved, showed a great deal of understanding of some of the barriers, as identified by disabled children, (Murray, 2002; EDCM, 2008), by suggesting what should be in place to create a more welcoming environment.

Roger: It depends what sort of thing it is really how they were to get there and stuff like that and if they do go if its someone with autism and they do go a bit like crazy, sorry I am just trying to put it in a nice way, if they do go a bit crazy if there is like a room where they can go just to calm down, just a little bit, and stuff like that and people who are trained to actually handle this stuff, if something like that actually happens, or if it

is like say if this building was one floor up if there was ways to actually get them up if they were in a wheelchair or something how easy it would be for them to get up.

Three young people mentioned the need for better accessibility, two mentioned better facilities, including the need for a quiet room, without music during a discussion about disabled children accessing clubs. Several of the younger children spoke at length about disabled people being excluded from an activity if they are without a part of the body, unless they had an additional aid, for example, “the metal thick shoes”, as seen on the Paralympics, or a computer which could read their thoughts, like the one Stephen Hawkings owns.

### **What do you think after seeing and hearing what disabled children say?**

In this section a wider range of attitudes, opinions and in some cases stronger feelings are revealed by the young people, as they reacted to the extra materials they saw and heard during the focus groups.

### *Mutual Respect*

Thoughts of disabled young people wanting respect, from the DVD, seemed to make an impression upon some of the young people, and instigated some interesting thoughts about both disabled and non-disabled thinking in the same way and perhaps being similar.

Pat: I think to be honest that they have just showed some of the views that we have showed, and I don't think that we have showed some of these views to people that we know are disabled, because we are worried about what they might think to be honest, they could be thinking like the same as we think, want to respect them for who they are, they have some things different, so what, so if that is how they want to be treated.

### *Bullying and intimidation*

Non-disabled young people's awareness of other people's actions and attitudes being a barrier to disabled young people was evident before the extra materials were shown to the young people, as discussed in the previous part of this chapter. One of the older girls who had already talked about non-disabled people's negative attitudes sounded and appeared visibly shocked in response to hearing comments made by disabled young people on the DVD.

Fiona: That's awful, they shouldn't feel like that, at the end of the day we are all human...(…)... and they should feel that they can do what they want to do, 'cos it's not fair if people stare 'cos that will just make them feel awful, like nobody is perfect at the end of the day, they're not perfect.

However one of the last comments made by the same girl at the end of the discussion in this group, seemed to intimate a discrepancy between her reaction to the focus group situation and the reality, perhaps when out with her friends, perhaps as Kyle and Davies point out, in an effort to say what the researcher wanted to hear. (1991)

Fiona: I'll admit like there's been people that I have seen that have been really disabled and I'll have stopped and I'll have stared but it's not because I am taking the mick, it is basically 'cos I've wanted to know why they're like that.

### *Over-protection*

Some of the older young people were worried earlier in the discussion about the effect of negative attitudes of others on the disabled young people's self esteem and risk. However after listening to the disabled young people on the DVD they were

concerned about non-disabled people being over-protective. This was mentioned in two groups but was a concern which developed within one group in particular.

Roger: I think they were right about some people being over protective towards them asking them what they want every second and being with them every single second, but if they like wanted to be alone like sometimes it will be alright.

Sarah: Yeh, I think that's like when we like said to make it more able for them to come to a club we could have maybe extra hands on help they might think that was over protection whereas we just think that we are being cautious incase anything happens

Trevor: ...it's compromising, but not too much in a way that you're going to make them feel as though they're constantly like being asked are you alright, you just got to think of them as being a normal person and treating them normally.

Gordon: if you just treat them like a normal person and don't make a big fuss or anything they get along with you more

because they don't feel like outcasts, they don't feel different, they shouldn't feel like that anyway

### *Feelings of resentment*

Interestingly seeing the same visual materials in another group instigated some quite different responses. Some of the participants in this group were adamant that disabled children are “growing up having, like being more privileged on things and we just get treated normal”. As they had little experience of disabled children elsewhere they discussed their experiences at school, their responses concurred with some research regarding feelings of resentment. (Evans et al, 2001; EENET)

Jack: they treat them like babies. Are you alright? Are you OK?.....How are you doooing? (Spoken in a sing-songy voice – ed)

Luke: I think that's really shocking, they wouldn't let me come down [to the youth club-ed] even if I'm doing really badly, 'cos I've got potential, but others who aren't doing well haven't got potential come down here anyway, its discrimination.

Receiving better treatment both in the community as well as in school (Dawkins, 1996, cited in Smith 200; Novita and Sibs) has been shown to be a possible source of stigmatisation of disabled children. One of this group worked in a theme park and been instructed that everyone should be treated 'the same'. He showed a lack of deeper understanding about why some disabled young people were being given, what he perceived as better treatment, this was echoed by another in the group.

Kev: They get special wrist bands that help them jump to the front of the queue

Jack: They jump the queues, yeh, they are really impatient and they can't wait and if they have to they just go AGHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH and get in.

### *Feelings of intimidation*

General lack of understanding of some of the behaviours exhibited by disabled young people and adults they met in the community could have been reasons for participants in two of the groups speaking about feeling scared and intimidated, reflecting findings reported elsewhere. (Aboud,2005:314)

Daisy: I know this lady called (...) and if you look at her she'll frighten you.

Luke: if you can't speak to her or she starts screaming at you and you can't understand what she's saying you feel intimidated by her screaming at you and tell you "aargh get off me and you've no right"

### *Feelings of Pity and Guilt*

A few of the young people spoke of feelings of guilt and pity, also recognised as mis-placed sympathy by Stalker and Connors (2004) when talking about disabled young people. This tragedy model way of thinking, also found in the initial findings in Beckett's study. (2009)

Daisy: I just call them special

Sarah: I thought it was quite sweet, 'cos they put their feelings across about how they think people see them like they said um don't have an attitude, that obviously they don't want people to see them as different.

Fiona: That's **awful**, they shouldn't feel like that, at the end of the day we're all human.

Daisy: I feel really sorry for him, when I'm with my friends, every time I see him, we're either on roller blades or on a bike or something he can't do

Talking about whether the non-disabled young people felt they could be friends with disabled children appeared to cause some anguish for one girl. There was a sense that not knowing how to handle these feelings or how to communicate with disabled children would result in avoidance and exclusion of disabled young people, concurring with Aboud's research (2005:314) and discomfort in another study. (Kyle and Davies, 1991:106)

Ann: Well I know it sounds awful, but I couldn't be friends with them, I couldn't know how to talk to them or know how to act with them, I'd feel guilty if they couldn't do what I was doing  
.....

### *Segregated provision*

Segregation of disabled young people from non-disabled young people, was a not a topic which was mentioned by the researcher,

but several of the non-disabled children in two groups felt that disabled children needed to be protected from the negative way they would be treated in a 'normal' youth club by having a special club of their own. One group raised this issue before and the other after seeing the extra materials. Maybe they were worried about the disabled children or maybe they were reflecting findings by Murray. (2004:138)

Oliver: there should be one building for them, so that people weren't pushing and all that and make fun of them and start beating them up.

Kev: Yeh, exactly and they are going to feel intimidated it they're the one disabled person 'cos people are gonna take the mick out of them.

#### *Adaptation for inclusion –awareness of barriers*

Making provision for disabled young people's needs was something a number of the young people were aware of before the second part of the focus group meetings when the visual aids were used, as mentioned in the last part of this chapter.

Trevor: .if somebody couldn't get up the stairs 'cos they've got a wheelchair well then what you should do is install disabled access like a lift or something so they are actually able to get upstairs.....it makes their life a lot easier and it makes our life a lot easier 'cos we don't have to think about them 24/7.

Once the young people had been shown the visual aids a number of different responses were expressed. Some discussion about alternative signage indicated that communication issues was being thought about, however the participants only thought of introducing alternative methods of communication into their own clubs, and did not generalise the idea. Although they were very interested in seeing the Braille (Appendix 8) and pictures (Appendix 9), this topic seemed to be the hardest for the young people to grasp as being a barrier to inclusion.

Very encouragingly three young people in different groups also said that young people in the club, or friends of the disabled children, could help them in the youth club if disabled children wanted to come.

There was some concern shown by one young man about the cost versus the quality of installing a ramp and the justification according to how much it would be used. Gordon was adamant that places should be accessible, “it shouldn’t have to be a second thought, it should already be there for people”

The last comment in this chapter from a young person should be left to Sarah, who continually listened and adapted her viewpoint throughout discussion.

that is a compromise that you have to meet you should not say like I’m not changing ‘cos really to me that’s discrimination and we’re not going to change it you can’t come and I think access and facilities as well as attitudes, if that all changes then they might want to come more and it might be easier for them to come.

### *Summary*

I would suggest that these experiences were not helping the young people form positive images of disabled young people, their lack of experience was giving them unrealistic images of disabled people

involved in sport, their only experience being through the media of super athletes , involved at competitive high level sports .

## **Chapter 5.** **Conclusion**

We can only know about the misinformation and misunderstandings that children have absorbed if we provide opportunities for them to say what they think about discriminatory issues. (Brown, 1998:87)

The inclusion of disabled young people into inclusive leisure settings cannot exist without non-disabled young people. Despite the existence of so many directives within official documents, internationally through to locally, regarding the participation and inclusion of all children and young people in inclusive leisure settings, as highlighted in Chapter 1, non-disabled young people have had very little opportunity to enter this debate. This research has looked at this issue but was unable to use previous studies of this specific area of concern as it is an under researched area, although a number of related studies included one looking at non-disabled young people's attitudes in school (Beckett, 2009) and another towards siblings (Stalker and Connors, 2004).

Revisiting the original four objectives set out for this research has revealed a number of initial conclusions. In response to the first

objective, the use of specific terminology, such as the words 'disability' or 'disabled' as understood within the social model of disability (Oliver, 1996) can actually cause confusion and responses from the participants which do not reflect their understanding. Exploring the second objective revealed that the young people had very little personal experience of disabled children accessing leisure, which could be seen to support suggestions that disabled children in general have very few opportunities to do so. The discussions also included awareness of some segregated sports as seen in the media.

Objectives 3 and 4 looked more specifically at the participants' awareness of disabling factors which affected the disabled young people's inclusion into leisure, before and after exposure to some extra information about disabling barriers. The responses were very varied. There were a wide range of mixed ideas, within and between groups. Most young people recognised negative attitudes as being a barrier to inclusion which is backed up by a wealth of research about disabled children. (eg Mencap, 2007) The types of feelings which the young people explained were wide ranging and depended upon the circumstances and the individuals or settings they were talking about. The confines of this small report do not allow full investigation. As this is an exploratory and initial

investigation about non-disabled young people's views, a decision was made to present as wide a range of the young people's thoughts as possible, instead of a deeper investigation of a few.

After watching the DVD and being presented with some more materials the young people were stimulated to share some more thoughts and feelings, which ranged from feelings of pity and guilt to those of feeling that the disabled children were over protected and need to be shown more respect. The brief 'exposure' of the non-disabled young people to a short film of disabled young people singing a Rap, had a noticeable and immediate affect upon some of the participants as noted in research by Innes and Diamond (1999), which could suggest that more contact with disabled young people and their opinions could benefit non-disabled young people.

The fact that some non-disabled young people felt intimidated, by disabled young people in some circumstances, but that the same young people recognised that disabled young people would also feel intimidated in other circumstances was one example of shared experiences. This issue could be an illustration of the power relationships as seen in James (1993). The effect of the disabled

young person intimidating a non-disabled young person, perhaps suggesting the latter is actually more worried about how to react than they would like to admit, concurring with Kyle and Davies (1991).

During the focus group interviews it became clear that most of the young people had met or come across disabled adults and young people in a number of different settings which affected their perceptions and attitudes. In general the young people were very limited in their knowledge about the impact of impairments and disabling factors on the lives of disabled young people. They were tending to generalise from the knowledge they did have even though it was not from an informed source. This led to complete extremes of denial that impairment would stop access to a sport (mental attitudes) to feeling that disabled children could be too much risk to themselves and others to be included.

In general the young people were very earnest and seemed honest in their responses to all the questions and materials presented. They were eager to share their thoughts as the researcher was to hear them. The older participants in particular

were thinking about everything said within the discussions as mentioned in Chapter 4.

This dissertation was a small scale investigation, by an inexperienced researcher. It has been shown that there are a wide range of understandings and misunderstandings about the barriers facing disabled young people. Their opinions, attitudes and awareness of these barriers was very mixed, but generally open to finding out more about them. It is felt that the non-disabled young people would benefit from being given more information. The findings and conclusions cannot be generalised, but are nevertheless felt to be important and are hoped to be a catalyst for further and deeper investigation

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1 - Young person info sheet and consent form

#### Information Sheet

# Hello!

I would like to hear your views; will you agree to talk to me please?

My name is Magda and I am a student at the University of Leeds. At the moment I am doing a project to find out about friendships and what non-disabled young people would think about disabled young people going to the same clubs as they do.

Things you might want to know if you agree to talk to me:

- we will meet in a small group (4-6)
- it's not a test
- I am really interested to hear what you think
- there are no right or wrong answers
- you don't have to answer every question
- we won't talk all night - up to half an hour
- I will use a tape recorder as it is important to remember exactly what everyone says BUT
  1. no names will be used, so no one else will know who said what
  2. if you ask me to stop recording at any time, I will
- After I have spoken to lots of young people I will write a report.

You can ask (insert name of youth worker) or me any questions you like before you decide whether to talk to me. You can also ask me any questions after we have talked.

I will need your parent's permission too, but even if they say that I can talk to you, you don't have to.

# Consent Form

**Your Name:**

Have you read the information sheet?  
(It is okay if someone has read it to you.)

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Did you understand the information about my project?

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you understand that you don't have to talk to me, even if your parent/guardian has said it is okay?

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you understand that you can ask a youth worker or me any questions before you make your mind up about whether to take part?

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you understand that you can stop talking to me at any point, and don't have to answer every question?

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Would you like to talk to me next week on Thursday 11th June at the youth club?

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Is it okay for me to record what you say on a tape recorder? (I will write up what everyone says, but won't ever use your name or say which words were yours.)

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Your signature:.....Date:

Appendix 2 – Parents information sheet and consent form

**Research Project: Friendships – understandings and misunderstandings between disabled and non-disabled young people at youth clubs.**

**Researcher: Magda Gay, School of Sociology and Social Policy,  
University of Leeds.**



**Information sheet**

I am a student from the University of Leeds, working on a project about friendships and what non-disabled young people would think about disabled young people going to the same clubs as they do.

I have been given permission by the youth workers to visit the club next week, Friday June 12<sup>th</sup>. I am writing to ask your permission to speak to your child. I will also be asking your child's permission and will not talk to them unless they agree to take part too.

**What am I going to ask the young people to do?**

I would like the young people to talk to me in small groups, to tell me what they think about disabled young people going to the same clubs as they do. There will be no more than 6 young people in each group. The discussion will be:

- friendly, 'informal' and non-stressful, involving some fun activities as well as conversation
- short – about half an hour
- recorded on a tape recorder and added to those of young people from other clubs

**No young people or club will be named at any point in the writing up of this research. I have an enhanced CRB clearance and the views of all children will be treated confidentially.**

If you would like to know more about this research before you reach your decision, please contact me: 0222233333, or leave your details with the youth club and I will get back to you. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr Angharad Beckett on 01111122223.

I do hope that you will be able to give consent for your child to be involved in this research and thank you in anticipation.

Please find a consent form attached. I would be grateful if you would complete and return this to the youth club on or before Friday 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

## CONSENT FORM

### Research Project: Friendships – understandings and misunderstandings between disabled and non-disabled young people at youth clubs.

Please complete and return to the youth club before or on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

Name of young person

.....

Please read the following statements and tick the appropriate boxes.

I am the parent or legal guardian of the child named above.	<b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>No</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
I have read the information sheet attached and understand what this project is about.	<b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>No</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project before reaching my decision.	<b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>No</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I can change my mind and decline to allow my child to be involved in this research.	<b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>No</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my child's involvement in this project would be voluntary and that they can refuse to be involved even if their parent/s and youth club have agreed.	<b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>No</b> <input type="checkbox"/>

I understand that the information children give during the project will be kept securely and confidentially and no young person or youth club will be named in any research publications.

**Yes**

**No**

I consent to my child taking part in a discussion group as part of this project.

**Yes**

**No**

Signature of parent/legal guardian:.....Date:.....

# Plan

## Introduction

### 6 questions

Listening to your opinions between each one

Look at computer

Listen to your opinions

Look at chart

Listen to your opinions

Look at something else

Listen to your opinions

Last 2 questions

Listen to your opinions

## **Appendix 4 – Questions**

**So you very kindly said you would help me with my project. In order for me to hear you properly on the tape recorder it would really help me if you would speak one at a time into the microphone.**

**We will start with some questions I'd like to ask you. You don't have to answer each question, but please listen to each other and give each other a turn to speak. If we have time, I would then like you to have a look at a few things I have brought and tell me what you think.**

**1. I'd like you to tell me 3 things, your name, your age and one toy/doll/game you have liked playing with at some stage in your life.**

**2. What do you think of when someone says a child is disabled? What does the word disabled mean?**

**3. Do you know of any activities disabled children get involved with?**

**4. What sort of activities might disabled children find difficult or not be able to do?**

**5. What sort of things might stop disabled children from doing the same activities as other young people?**

**6. Is there anything which you could think of which could make it easier for them to go to more places and do more things?**

**Attitude**

Do you think that other children make them welcome?

Why do you think other young people might not want disabled children there?

**Friends /attitudes**

When you do something after school who do you usually go with?

How do you get to know your friends? Where do you meet them?

Do you know where most disabled children go to school?

Do you think disabled children are able to see their school friends after school too?

Any ideas about why they may not be able to see their friends as easily as you do?

**Access**

Do you think it is easy for them to get to the activities they want to do?

Any ideas about the sorts of things might be stopping them?

If someone was blind how will they know where everything is in the club?

**Communication**

What about disabled children who are not able to speak?

Do you have any ideas about how they might let people know what they want?

How do you think that could that be made better for them?

What about disabled children who cannot see very well or who are blind?  
– finger spelling, braille

**7. To finish off with, I am going to show you 3 things and ask you what you think about each one.**

**8. Attitudes - Computer rap or use attitude quotes**

**What do you think about what they were saying in the rap?**

**“Talk to us-not about  
Laugh with us ’n why d’ ya shout?  
Listen up to what we say  
Talk to the hand aint the way**

**Feelings we have  
Don't ya know  
It hurts inside  
May not show"**

**9. Access – card with chart**

**These are things some disabled children have said they think about before they go to an activity – what do you think?**

**10. Communication – widget and braille**

**What do you think about these different ways of passing on information?**

**11. What sort of things might stop disabled children from doing the same activities as other young people?**

**12 Is there anything which you could think of which could make it easier for them to go to more places and do more things?**

**If you have anything else you would like to say afterwards please talk to me or one of the youth workers, or write it down or record it on the tape recorder.**

**Thank you so much for joining in and listening to each other and to me. I have enjoyed listening to what you think and it will really help me with my university work.**

## Appendix 5 – RAP Lyrics

ask us, we're *Included*



# RAP Lyrics

*Written by Gavin Prime and Maureen Murray*

## **Attitudes**

### **Sticks 'n stones can**

Break your bones but

### **Words can never hurt ya**

### **Who said that they**

Don't know Jack 'n  
It aint nice if they dirt ya

Don't be rude 'n  
Don't be crude  
Don't put us in a bad bad mood

Mood – mood – who's in a mood – don't you have an attitude

Attitude – attitude – attitude – attitude

Bully, bully  
Don't cha dare  
Just include us  
Be a – ware

Talk to us – not about  
Laugh with us 'n why d' ya shout?  
Listen up to what we say  
Talk to the hand aint the way

Feelings we have  
Don't ya know  
It hurts inside  
May not show

Show – show – show them what, attitudes – attitudes – they must stop

## Appendix 6 – Attitude Quotes

“I don’t want to feel like a nuisance or somebody different.  
I just want to do everything that everybody else does.”

I want to:  
“Stop people staring”

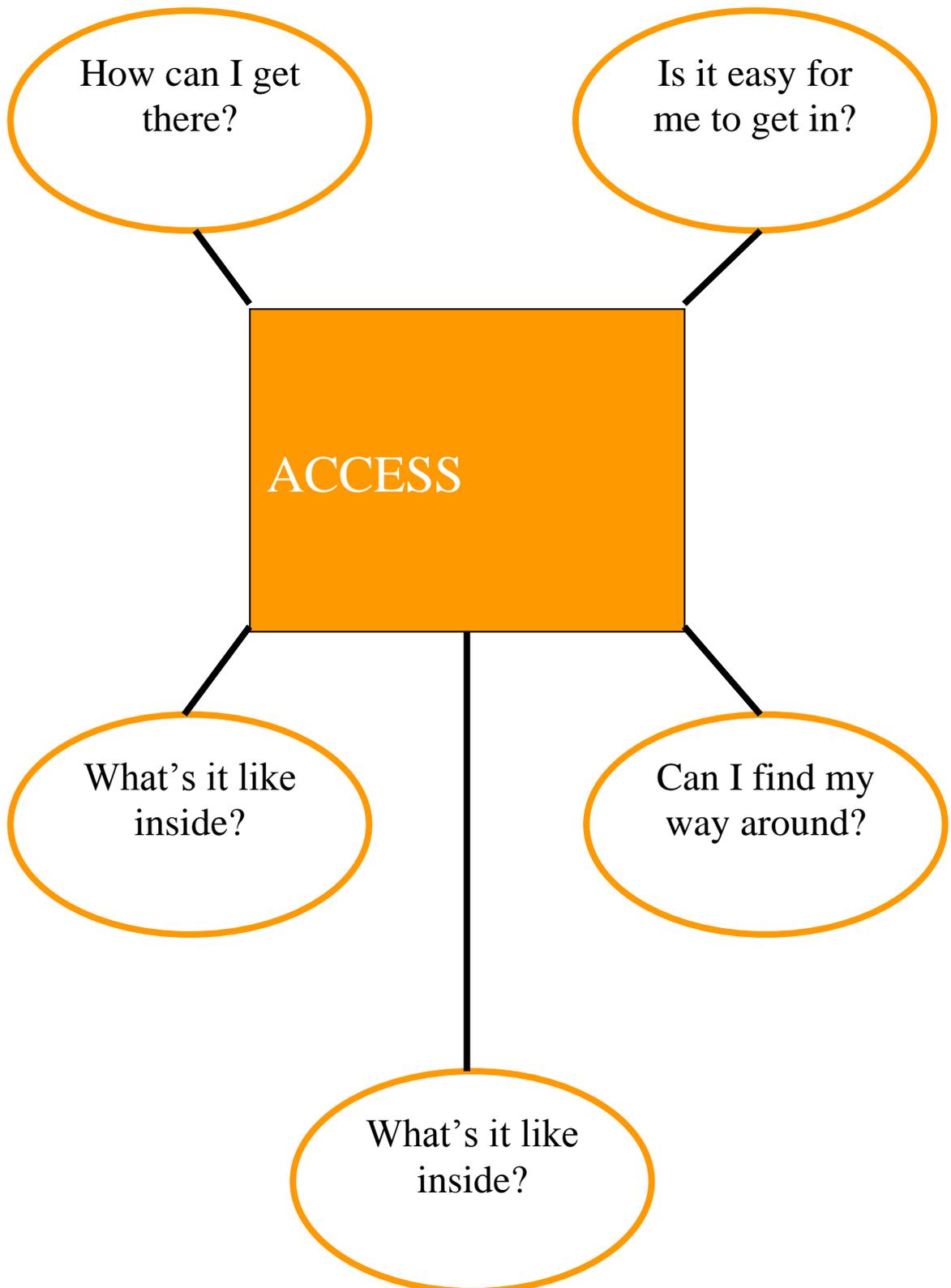
## Appendix 7 – Access Chart

ask us - we're included

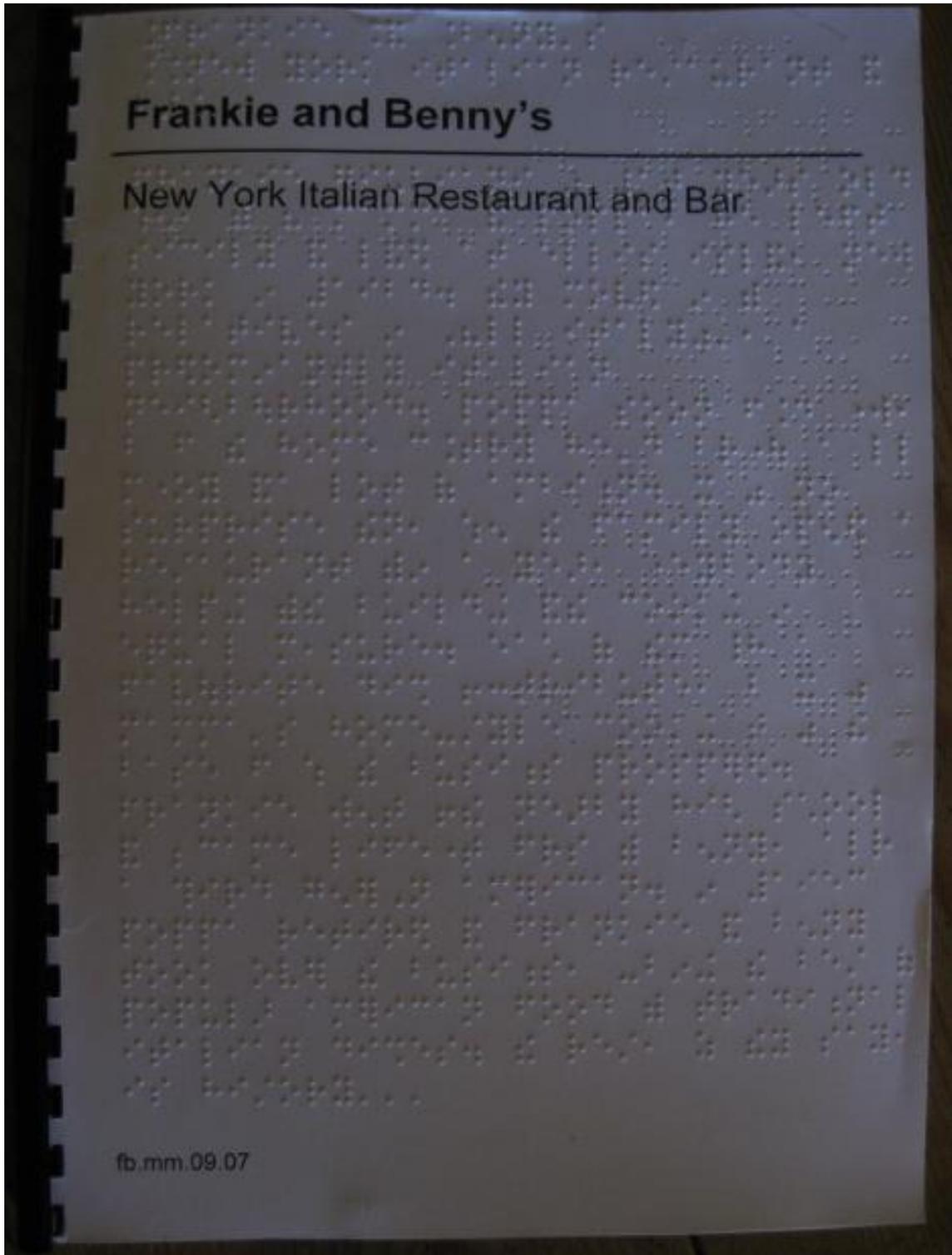
# “How to” guide to your resource pack



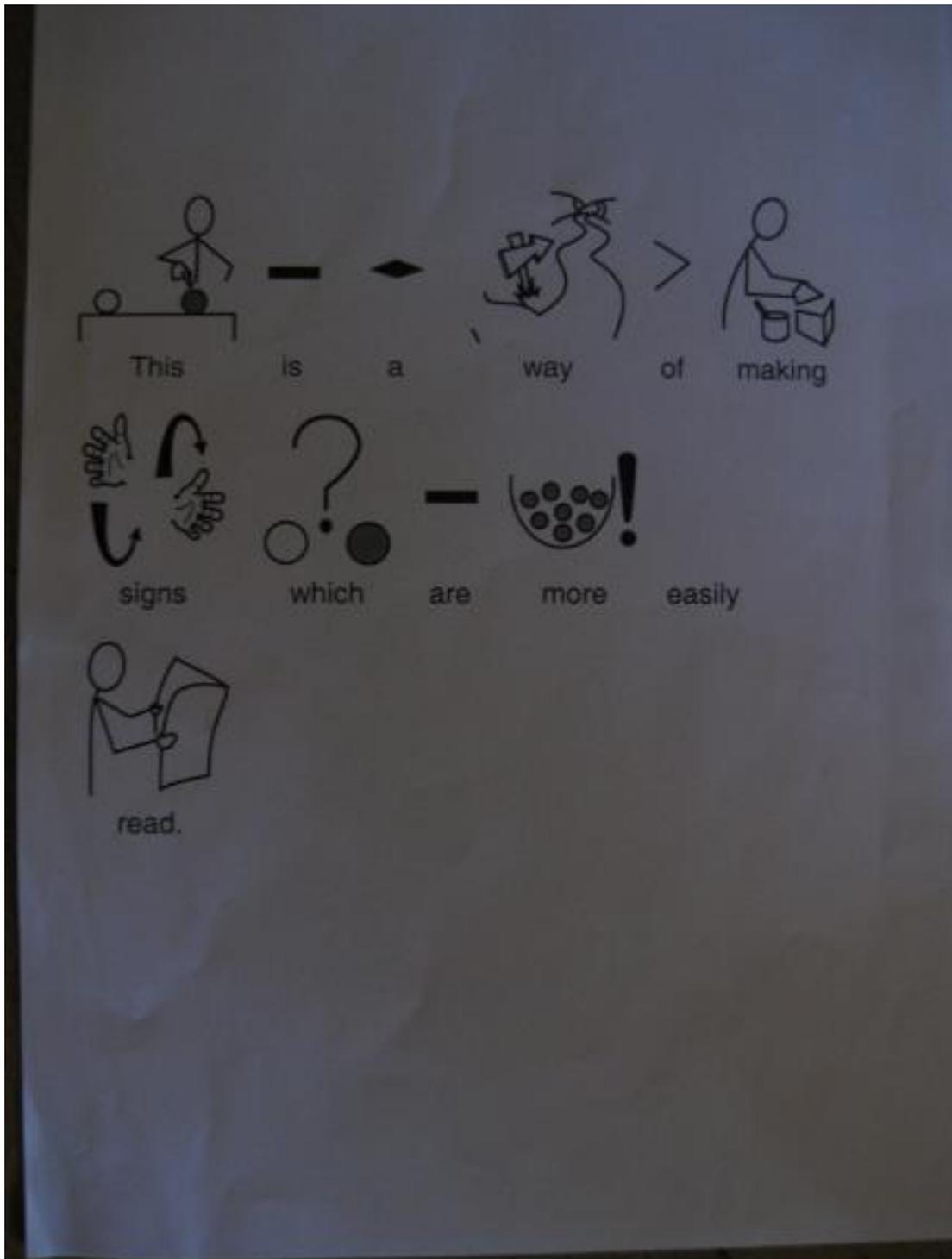
## Things to consider



Appendix 8 – Menu in Braille



Appendix 9 – Pictorial Writing



## Appendix 10 – Evaluation Sheet

Thank you for spending some time sharing your thoughts and views with me today, you have helped my research massively.

If you would like to say anything else , talk to me later or write down what you would like to say , then give it to me or a youth worker.

1. Tell me what you thought about being involved in the group.
  
2. Which things did you like talking about and why?
  
3. Was there anything which was difficult to talk about and why?
  
4. Any other comments?

**Appendix 11 – Summary of answers given on evaluation sheets.**

**Answers given on evaluation sheets.**  
(as the young people had written them)

<b>Question 1</b>		
<b>Club</b>	<b>YP</b>	<b>Tell me what you thought about being involved in the group.</b>
FGP		No answers
FG1		No answers – chose not to complete evaluation forms
FG2		good
		Helped get things of my chest how I felt about disabled people
		It was enlightening and let me express my views
		I thought it was okay and I didn't mind helping out the lady with her course
		Some of the questions I didn't really answer because I wasn't sure what some questions meant
FG3		I learnt new things and it was a good talk
		I feel happy to do it, And I learnt new things
		I learn new things
FG4		I thought it was good because we get to expressed ourselves because we don't really get to
		It was good to be included and give my thought. I learned a lot about things I may not have thought about before
		I think it has helped me to better understand disabled people
		It was good and I lurned a lot

<b>Question 2</b>		
<b>Club</b>	<b>YP</b>	<b>Which things did you like talking about and why?</b>
FGP		Other people that we know that are disabled
		About people we know who are disabled, because we could share our own knowledge.
FG1		No answers – chose not to complete evaluation forms
FG2		All of it
		Everything because it was something different
		The way they get treated more special than us because it's outrageous
		I liked to express my opinions on everything because it let her know how we felt
		Talking abut how we could help them because we were discussing something positive
FG3		Everything
		Everything
		Everything
FG4		All of them

		The rap and opinions as I thought it was interesting
		The access and communication I saw new things.
		Everything

<b>Question 3.</b>		
<b>Club</b>	<b>YP</b>	<b>Was there anything which was difficult to talk about and why?</b>
FGP		If we could welcome disabled people too our youth club because I felt a bit mean if I could not talk to them
		Nothing really
FG1		No answers – chose not to complete evaluation forms
FG2		No
		No because I speak my mind
		No
		No I don't think so
		Describing our first thoughts when we heard the word 'disabled'
FG3		Nothing
		No
		Not really
FG4		Nothing
		No
		No
		No

<b>Question 4.</b>		
<b>Club</b>	<b>YP</b>	<b>Anything else? /Any other comments?</b>
FGP		I've said everything I could think of together
FG1		No answers – chose not to complete evaluation forms
FG2		No
		No
		No
		Hoped I helped with your findings
		-
FG3		No
		No
		No
FG4		It was good and interesting
		It was good and interesting
		No
		I lurned a lot and I will treat the people right

Appendix 12 – Thank You Card



**Appendix 13 – Summary of Focus Group Settings, time of meetings and Participants.**

**Summary of focus group settings, time spent with each group and details of participants**

<b>FG</b>	<b>YC</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>gender</b>	<b>age</b>	<b>school</b>	<b>added info given by young people</b>
<b>FGP</b>	1	Ann	female	12		
Interview:45 mins Town YC in community centre, special school nearby.		Brenda	female	12		Younger brother has Down's Syndrome
		Clare	female	12		She told the group she had dyslexia
		Daisy	female	12		
<b>FG1</b>	2	Earl	Male	16		
Interview:15 mins Market town - YC in youth centre on school grounds, special school just outside town.		Fiona	Female	16		Doing college course to work with children, wants to work with disabled children
		Gordon	male	18		'Fostered' variety of people for 8 years. Works on youth work project doing outdoor activities/training, including involvement of some disabled yp.
<b>FG2</b>	3	Hilary	female	14		
Interview:30 mins Market town – YC in youth centre in centre of town, newly refurbished terrace house, on two floors. Special school nearby.		Isobel	female	14		
		Jack	Male	15		
		Kev	Male	16		Said he had asthma, but this didn't count as a disability. Works at local theme park where he had undertaken some equality and diversity training.
		Luke	male	16		
<b>FG3</b>	4	Mike	male	13		
Interview:35 mins Newly refurbished YC in portacabin on RAF base. Local school in market town with nearby special school.		Nick	male	14	Local Special school	
		Oliver	male	11		"nearly 12" he said
<b>FG4</b>	4	Pat	Female	14		
Interview:40 mins As FG3 above		Roger	Male	15		
		Sarah	Female	16		Works on youth work project doing outdoor activities/training, including involvement of some disabled yp
		Trevor	male	16		He informed the group he had ADHD