

Bulmershe Explorers, Youth and Community Centre, November 2008

The Youth and Community Worker who runs this club for young people with learning difficulties requested three weekly workshops on relationships and sexuality, in response to some current problems in the group. Working with the group's issues in this way proved both rewarding and challenging for members of Spotlight and everyone at Bulmershe Explorers – a condom was produced by one of the young people in the final workshop!

The drama was specially devised for the twelve young people and included a performer with learning difficulties. In each scene, adult characters with learning difficulties had issues to deal with, as did the day centre staff. Using Forum Theatre, the group suggested how performers could try to solve the problems and the bravest young people came on stage themselves to role-play their solution, gaining a welcome round of applause if it was successful.

Week one focussed on negotiating touch and dating: how to know when it was appropriate to hug, telling someone you don't want to go out with them and how to turn down unwanted physical contact. It is not uncommon for some adults with learning difficulties to find it hard to know what the rules are and what is appropriate in intergenerational expressions of affection and sexuality. This was an issue the club had encountered recently and the solutions worked out through the drama were thorough and competent; much knowledge of the law was shared by the group, as well as how to deal practically with such a difficult issue. Week two covered how to recognise and respond to inappropriate and abusive sexuality from an adult such as a carer. Week three addressed being faithful within a relationship and negotiating levels of sexual contact: deciding when to say no and what to do if your partner is putting pressure on you to go further than you feel comfortable with. Gay relationships, homophobia and prejudice against adults with learning difficulties showing affection in public were all raised. Homophobic bullying was a live issue and it brought up some interesting comments: *gay people have human rights and perhaps their parents would not like them to kiss at home so they should be allowed to show affection in the club as it is somewhere safe for them to go*, as well as expressions of homophobia from a couple of the young men.

In the last week one of the Bulmershe Explorer volunteers suggested that one of our characters, Peter the incompetent worker, be sacked. This got a round of applause. It was really gratifying to see adults with learning difficulties not just debate issues around touch and sexuality but also think about and begin to set standards regarding what they want from adults working with them.

The staff and members of Bulmershe Explorers made Spotlight on Diversity very welcome, and enthusiastically engaged with the drama.