



# Evaluation: Year 6 Transitions, Summer Term 2020

## **Half Moon: Year 6 Transitions Project**

### **Overview**

This project uses drama and Forum Theatre techniques, over a series of workshop sessions, to engage 11 year olds with the issues and difficulties around the move to secondary school in a fun and creative way. The aim of the project is for participating young people to consider, in a structured and supported environment, some of the challenging issues they may face when starting secondary school.

There is a recognised and recorded decline in achievement in many young people within the first two years of secondary school and evidence shows that those who struggle in the first few weeks of Year 7 are affected by this for the rest of Key Stage 3 and thereafter.

This year, the project worked with three primary schools in Tower Hamlets (twelve groups), delivered online by two Half Moon drama tutors. Each class received four workshops between June and July, which were tailored to their individual and group concerns.

### **The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic**

Following the changes to school life brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, we knew that the project would be needed more than ever as many children would have faced huge disruption to their final term of primary school. We also knew that our traditional format of delivery, in-person, would not be possible. From communicating with schools in Tower Hamlets, we understood that their restrictions included not allowing external practitioners into school settings. This meant we had to quickly and efficiently adjust the programme to be deliverable online. We were still able to successfully achieve our aims and objectives in this online format. During planning, we considered how to uphold the government guidelines in place at the time. Vigilance in maintaining social distancing between young people in their small school bubbles was key to adapting our practices. Although we were not physically in the space with the young people, we adapted exercises so that young people did not have to move around, be near or touch other people in the room. The young people could, however, still discuss and interact with their peers which is an important aspect of the project so shared understanding and problem-solving is developed.

We found that online delivery with small groups of young people gave us space to have more conversations than usual, as we moved the focus from the frequency of practical activities, to allowing more space for open-ended discussions. The benefit of this ongoing shift across the four sessions was that the sessions were increasingly led by the young people, as the discussions moved between their individual anxieties to building on the problem-solving capabilities of the group. We felt that this allowed for more trust and understanding in the space between the young people, their teachers and the drama facilitators. Conversation-focused learning ultimately resulted in a very well-rounded and positive experience even though we might have had concerns that the online aspect would have been a barrier to real engagement.



Delivering the project online was also successful in terms of still engaging the young people practically and keeping their enthusiasm high. In this uncertain time, we found this work around transitions to be critical, as due to the crisis so many young people had missed large amounts of school. Perhaps most importantly, it offered a fun and engaging session once a week, which provided structure for young people in an unnerving and unprecedented time. We created separate online resources for young people that were not returning to their school setting, so they were included and able to consider their own transition.

We kept our requests for evaluation and monitoring as simple as possible to support school staff and not add too many additional asks during this difficult time. We have collated feedback from the young people and their teachers as well as monitoring data on all groups accessing our transitions resources, which includes young people in their school settings as well as those who accessed it from home.

## **Funders**



## **Schools**

Chisenhale Primary, (3 bubbles)  
 Malmesbury Primary, (4 bubbles)  
 Old Ford Primary, (3 bubbles)  
 Olga Primary, (2 bubbles)

## **Monitoring**

### **In School Settings**

- 107 young people took part
- 58 are girls
- 27 of whom receive Free School Meals
- 89 participants are from an ethnic background other than white British
- 11 participants with a SEN

### **At Home**

- 99 young people took part
- 47 are girls
- 26 of whom receive Free School Meals
- 91 participants are from an ethnic background other than white British
- 14 participants with a SEN



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A further 49 children received the online activities at home but the schools were not able to confirm whether these children had accessed them. We hope that even if these 49 children had not accessed the activities before the end of July, they will do so with their families over the summer holidays.

### **Evaluation summary**

The project ran smoothly across all four schools, with many elements being successfully developed in response to the evaluation of last year's project. This year we ensured that one session was planned to specifically target raising awareness around online safety; something Half Moon feels is particularly prevalent in the lives of young people right now and something which is not being addressed successfully by other interventions as yet. The participants responded well to the project, and thoroughly enjoyed the forum theatre video.

As the project was delivered online this year, the forum theatre piece was a pre-recorded video shown to the young people in class time after the first online introductory session. This format was successful in that the individual groups' teachers could show the video more than once, also allowing for questions to arise before bringing these to the structured sessions delivered by the Half Moon drama tutors. Scenes from this video were then repeated and performed by the drama tutors in the online sessions, with space for the young people to evaluate the characters' decisions and ultimately change the outcomes to be positive.

Every young person learned something new about what was to come at secondary school, including exploring choices they may not have thought about before. There was an evidenced increase in young people's confidence about starting secondary school and significant improvements in their problem-solving skills by the end of the project. The project ended on a high note, having tackled some difficult subjects, with many young people openly sharing their aspirations for secondary school and being honest about the negative traits they would like to leave behind them.

### **Planning**

The project has three Phases, spread across four sessions, and in our planning we looked to thoroughly identify what the aims and objectives were for each Phase, to ensure that what we delivered would meet these in the best possible way. Through delivering this programme for a number of years, it was decided that the following themes were appropriate and imminent in the everyday lives of the participants:

Phase 1: gathering the particular concerns and hopes of the young people about the move to secondary school.

Phase 2: showing a short **Forum Theatre** video, set during the first few weeks of starting secondary school, and focusing on two characters whose stories we felt particularly highlighted the issues most pressing for the young people with whom we were working. Phase 2 stretched across two sessions with each group.



[**Forum Theatre** provides scenarios designed to stimulate audience participation through discussion, interactive role-playing and shared experiences effecting positive and constructive change. This is achieved by examining, challenging and altering through rehearsing difficult situations/problems in advance - to understand how different strategies might be used to deal with complex social situations.]

Importantly, the young people are given practical opportunities to evaluate their own decision making through examples of negative outcome-based scenarios. They play an active role in having the 'power to change' negative outcomes in a safe environment; acting as observers and critical thinkers with their peers. The participants have time to discuss strategies to help them deal with any problems faced, including: bullying, taking opportunities (e.g. afterschool clubs), old and new friendships, online safety and social media.

Phase 3: focused on how to be safe online, discussing how communication online is harder to interpret than in real life. This included thinking about fake news and how we can identify what is real and what is not. We ended by thinking about the support networks young people have access to in their lives and at secondary school, which can be utilised if any problems arise. We reinforced the fact that we looked at all the negative things that could happen together so they had the tools to face these situations, and left them thinking about the multitude of positives they will experience on their secondary journey. We allowed time for young people to share any final worries or questions they may have, whilst reminding them of the people at home and in their school setting, they are able to ask. Most importantly, this phase leaves the project on a positive note as the young people can see the people around them that are there to support their transition.

This project was the first time many of the groups had addressed these issues or thought in any great detail about the reality of moving schools. In the first workshop many of the young people were brave enough to not 'go with the crowd' and be honest in their answers about how they were feeling about transitioning to Year 7. The project felt like a crucial beginning in a process of preparing the Year 6s for secondary school and this was reiterated in the answers the young people gave in their feedback.

The Forum Theatre video focused on two characters, Mark and Amari, whose experiences during the first few weeks of starting secondary school jointly encapsulated most of the concerns expressed by the groups. A third actor plays a multitude of characters from an older student who thrives in spreading fake news to an encouraging teacher. The scenes within the play created clear dilemmas and choices, where the choices made would clearly lead to different outcomes for their secondary school future. Mark also plays Ryan, who alongside a character called Jess, act as Year 9 bullies that intimidate Amari into conforming to their idea of what cool is. Ryan's character also uses peer pressure to encourage Sean, played by Amari, to be disruptive and be mean to a teacher. Sean has another scene with Mark and tries to engage him in coming to after school try outs for the football team.

The story of Amari was also used to explore the difficulty of bullying by older students, changing personalities and appearances to fit in, and friendship dilemmas and new friend versus old friend. Mark's story looked at finding the new school environment overwhelming, finding the work difficult and how not dealing with this early and well can lead to problems down the line.

**Mark** begins secondary school enthusiastic but very nervous about all the changes and information. Mark is overwhelmed and unfortunately absorbs the exaggerated lies told by an older student Jordan. Mark works hard but finds Maths particularly difficult, which is not helped by Amari, who seems to find it easy. Homework is put off and offers of help from parents are ignored, and Mark is easily distracted by other things at home. Panicking about the incomplete work, Mark tries to copy Amari but they both get caught and get a detention. Mark is faced with a dilemma in choosing between an old primary school friend and potentially new exciting friends. Mark also has a scene in the playground with Sean who tries to make friends through playing football. However, their shyness results in Mark coming across as very unfriendly.

**Amari** is unexpectedly picked on by two older students at school. Amari is bullied for their school uniform because they are behaving and following the rules. This leaves them feeling deflated and pressurised and Amari decides to emulate one of the bully's mannerisms. This bullying behaviour by the older student means we start to see a change in Amari's behaviour and appearance in school. Amari remains friends with Mark when they both end up in detention together and then is faced with a dilemma as Mark's new friend invites only Mark out after school when they (Amari and Mark) had already made plans.

### **Project Successes**

This project clearly helps young people by looking at preventative solutions and building resilience. The participants are thinking about lots of things for the first time; new friendships, bullying, potential issues they sense that may come up. This project gives the groups the

opportunity to talk about their fears openly in a safe space and raises awareness and understanding around things that could potentially arise at secondary school. It gives participants a chance to rehearse potential situations and imagine what they might do. Presenting the young people with scenarios to understand how different strategies might be used in dealing with complex social situations enables them to practically engage with potential scenarios and try their instinctive responses in a safe space.

It was interesting to see young people who felt they could handle a situation, but maybe didn't quite grasp the consequences of their actions. Forum Theatre gives them the opportunity to reflect on the outcomes discussed: perceived ideas versus reality. Seeing the young people navigate their first instincts and find more well thought-through responses was interesting. The group's learning was collective. Through the acting activities, the children were included, informed and inspired. They really enjoyed thinking about situations, and how others can perceive the same situation differently. An example of this would be in the bullying scene where participants vocalised negative responses to a secondary suggestion of aggression. The warm-up activities inspired the participants to work together as a whole group allowing children to voice their opinions and support each other.

The online safety session proved particularly successful, with young people having a lot of enthusiasm for the topic. We felt as a team that this was the most informative session overall for the young people, as it consumes so much of their lives and they understand the topic so well. The session explored stranger danger, the ways in which we can misinterpret things online, and the possible effects of only using the internet to communicate. Young people had an opportunity to discuss the ways in which we interact with peers, adults, and strangers online through practical exercises, including script work and using emojis to construct sentences, for example.

Across the sessions, some young people who had initially shown reluctance and reservation to join in started to slowly, but surely, develop self-confidence. This was achieved through their own perseverance, friendships formed within the group and via tutor/young person communication. The format of Forum Theatre allowed the young people the opportunity to build their confidence through speaking up in a new way, and we found that through this, they had lots to say. The participants felt proud of themselves and recognised skills they were acquiring through discussion and working things out in practical ways. We focused on the young people having individual goals/objectives for the coming months and reiterated that it is ok for those to be different from those of other people; that no two experiences of transition will be the same. We also emphasised the need for young people to be honest with themselves and others and not to allow other people to make your decisions for you.

There were many moments in the project where the participants were particularly empathetic and showed a real sense of caring for their friends at secondary school, old and new. There were some very emotionally intelligent moments. Through the forum, young people were able to identify the impact a friend may feel if they were left out of a friendship group, for example. The groups discussed the ways in which you can potentially make someone feel like an 'outsider' or 'different'. Ultimately, they understood the negative impact of 'not including' friends and peers, and shared their anxiety around not wanting to be treated this way. Proposing the idea that secondary school is linked to their life goals made the young people

think about secondary school as not only an educational institution, but also a place for personal development and to realise their goals. Young people particularly learnt about the importance of reporting things to teachers, parents or people at home, learning that it is not their sole responsibility to solve any difficult situations they may encounter.

All groups were very honest about their current behaviour in primary school which they know they should be leaving behind, saying things such as - I want to leave behind: mistreating friends; lacking confidence, and not taking up opportunities; being disrespectful to the teachers; distracting people. They were also able to see their positive attributes, saying that they wanted to keep: kindness; making people laugh; being good at maths, science, etc. In all groups we also had a very positive discussion around whether it is possible to achieve what we want if we hold on to negative behaviours and all agreeing that negative behaviours hold us back.

We ensured that all young people knew that although our project, and particularly the Forum Theatre video, focused on many struggles with going to secondary, that it would be a very positive experience too, as they would be given responsibility and a chance to be a new version of themselves if they had a lot of negative things they wanted to leave behind in primary school. All groups took something from the project, and many took away ideas and information that they hadn't thought about before. This included how to avoid negative scenarios, as well as how to deal with problems that arise. By the end of the programme, many of the young people grew in confidence and could place themselves closer to 'really confident', when thinking about how they felt about transition and could articulate maturely why they felt more confident.

Overall, the young people who took part felt more prepared for the important transition they were about to go through. They had highlighted their concerns, felt confident talking about them and were encouraged to share those fears with their parents/carers at home, to ensure their parents/carers could support them more effectively during transition. They also shared their fears with one another, meaning that if they move to secondary school with other people from their primary school, they can support each other during the first few weeks. The young people explored, in a practical way, some scenarios that might come up in their first few weeks of secondary school, thus exploring how they might feel and what the outcome might be of different reactions and behaviours on their part, which would equip them with experiences that they can refer to if challenges and difficult situations arise. It was helpful for them all to hear other people articulating that they held similar fears to them.

### **A Selection of Comments from Young People**

- *There was lots of stuff we did not know happened in secondary school, and this taught us.*
- *I learnt a lot about making good choices.*
- *I was worried about secondary school because I'm not very confident, but I feel better now.*
- *It made me think about what people have going on in their lives that would make them want to upset other people. I now want to be kind to everyone.*

- *I learnt that by reporting bullying, I could be helping that person to get support.*
- *I was scared of secondary school because I'm nervous, shy and don't want to get bullied, but talking about it made me feel better. I learnt that most people felt the same.*
- *I learnt to not let my faith go down.*
- *If other people reject me, it's part of life, and I have learnt to get over it as they will miss out not me.*
- *I know secondary is going to be a lot harder, as I have been here for a long time, but now I am excited too.*
- *I learnt if someone upsets me, it's not that deep. It's all about my reaction and moving forward.*
- *A lot of people have a lot going on, but just because they are angry, it doesn't mean you have to be angry back.*
- *I am ready to leave behind my attitude when it comes to talking to teachers.*

#### **Comments from teachers included:**

- *The scenarios in the drama scenes reflected the children's experiences, making them feel real to them.*
- *The sessions were inclusive as all children had a voice and felt able to feed back.*
- *The first session, where we did some drama games, was memorable as we have not done zoom lessons before.*
- *Seeing the children gain confidence with stopping scenes and sharing their ideas was memorable.*
- *I think we are more able to have open and honest conversations with them about what might be worrying them [following this project]. We can now discuss problem-solving strategies and advice, drawing on the topics covered in the project.*
- *As a result of this project, we have been able to have more frequent discussions about transition with our Year 6s as we can link back to what we covered in the project.*
- *Thank you, Half Moon! Impeccable organisation as always! Everyone has been very excited about this programme: children, staff, learning mentors and senior leadership. Our children needed this programme more than ever and you made sure it happened by making all the necessary adaptations. We are so grateful. THANK YOU SO MUCH!*

#### **Areas for Development**

The following areas were identified by the team as ways to develop and improve the project, or alternative approaches to explore if it were to be delivered in the future:

- Increasing time and space for more conversation when young people are sharing their ideas, rather than always having practical exercise focused sessions.



- Allocate time for a Q & A, with the young people anonymously writing their questions or concerns about secondary school in advance of sessions, then addressing these together in the session, so it is led by the young people.
- Consider the language that the drama tutors use around the topic of bullying. Particularly using the term 'bullying behaviour' rather than the word bully, to avoid the imposition of labels and instead promote behaviours as changeable.
- Online safety as an issue will need to be 'living' and change in-line with new developments and trends.
- Establish equality within the sessions between boys and girls. In theatre, girls can play boys and boys can play girls. This will encourage girls' confidence to speak up.

### **Conclusion**

The project was a clear overall success, meeting the aims and objectives outlined in the planning and adapting well to a new form of delivery in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. This project provided much needed space for young people who were about to experience the secondary transition; a potentially very challenging time, made even more so this year from the disruption to the final term of primary school for all Year 6s. Sessions were full of discussions around differences and change, empowering the participants to think, feel, share, take part, practically examine and critically evaluate their journeys. Further evaluation from this year undoubtedly means the project will continue to grow in strength if it were to run again. The Forum Theatre technique continues to prove successful as a practical and active way for young people to start to explore some of the issues related to transition. As a method, it was adaptable to each of the groups, as we were able to change the conversations according to the young people's energy and responses. Forum Theatre and role-play allow them to explore the consequences of their actions and choices, in a safe and supported environment. Importantly the young people understood that, through positive decisions, they can achieve great things.

