



ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOURS PROGRAMME

Spotting and Managing Risk

AYLESBURY 2019

*"Never again will I let a man treat me
this way."* (participant J)

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All young participants have been anonymized due to safeguarding



Background

Mama Bee has been frequently working with vulnerable young women in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, who are currently in the local authority care system and resident with their babies. Mama Bee identified a need to offer further support to enable the young women to become more assertive in decisions that relate to themselves, their mental and physical health and that of their children. All the young women had all been through traumatic life events with some fleeing violence, control and fear for their lives.

Mama Bee recognises young people who are supported, often show a decline in risk taking in transition to adulthood, whilst working to achieve self-regulation, responsibility, connection, and identity.

In many different professional interventions with young people, achieving independence is often discussed. However, it is also crucial to build in interdependence, connection to others, and support successful transitions to relationships, further educational opportunities and meaningful employment.

A sense of belonging to a community and connection to self and others are extremely important elements when staying safe and achieving consistent positive life outcomes.

Mama Bee continually identifies that one of the important key elements in managing risk and positive decision making for many young people, is not being influenced by the actions and opinions of others over their own. This and other principles led to the creation of the Assertive Behaviours Programme, to provide the opportunity for the young women we work with to explore all of these personal processes.



"We are all human and we often feel very different at times throughout our lives, how we approach decision making and personal development is never a fixed process. There are so many factors that can influence us. Some we are aware of and some that are hidden."

(Amber Preen, Founder of Mama Bee)

The Project

At the heart of The Assertive Behaviours Programme was the desire to create a safe environment for the young women who were identified to take part, as well as to build resilience and enable them to explore positive decision making. Mama Bee and the team at RGA Gym in Aylesbury have worked closely together to ensure the physical activity offered matched the needs of the group, allowing time for discussions linked to empowerment and personal progression.

A full break down of what was covered in each session is attached in appendix A.

Aims

The aims of the project were:

- To look at and build on the protective factors that buffer young people from negative life experiences
- The development of self-regulatory behaviours and the ability to function successfully when managing personal risk and making decisions
- To identify good communication techniques that enable young people to seek out meaningful employment and engage in further educational opportunities



- The renegotiation of relationships with adults and identified support networks (especially if problematic)
- To look at self-care, to recognise "*I am enough!*" and celebrate personal achievements
- To identify and assess the needs and social support network of young people so they can be better connected to a trusted community
- To identify effective emotional health components that enable young people to emerge from the systems they have been part of as resilient, healthy, and hopeful for the future

Each Assertive Behaviours session was designed to have a specific development theme and to have a positive impact on the young women's lives by improving their self-esteem, building their resilience and promoting a positive approach to decision making for themselves and their children.

Methods of Delivery

During the early planning stages of The Assertive Behaviours programme it was agreed to use a mixed method approach to deliver a message of physical and mental health and personal safety.

The sessions were planned to run with the first half being around discussion-based activities linking to issues such as:

- What it is like being a single/young parent
- What would you tell your younger self?
- How we listen varies from person to person and so this can lead to misinterpretation
- Who are the people we most trust?



The second half of the programme was planned to be delivered by qualified Brazilian Jiu Jitsu instructors who would teach the young women how to remove themselves from a physical situation through simple and effective techniques.

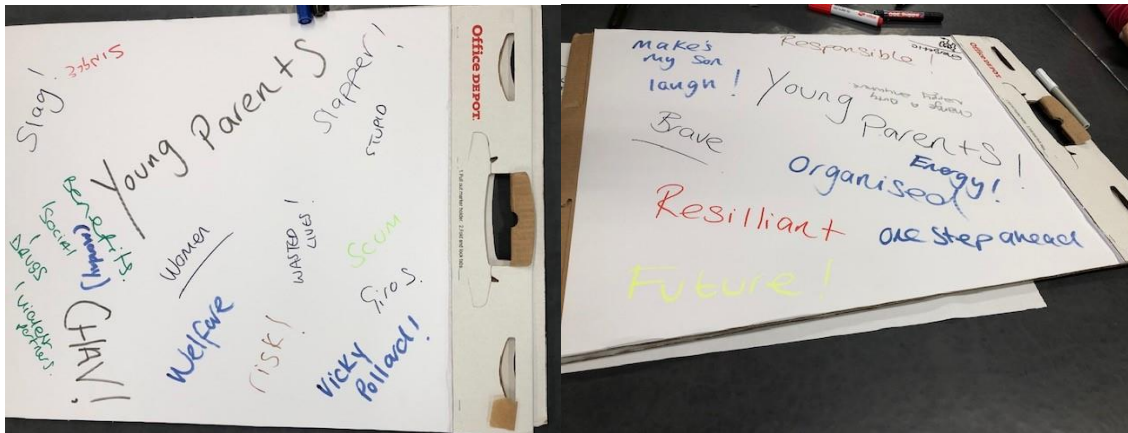
It was acknowledged that participating in the physical activity and open discussion could raise some uncomfortable memories for the young woman. A quiet and safe discussion space was provided for those who felt they may need to sit out and speak to a qualified youth worker.

Implementation

The sessions were delivered as outlined and were made flexible enough to allow for any additional issues that may arise (such as a real fear that one of the young women would lose her baby into care). The physical activities were kept fun and engaging but at all times with the message of gaining practical skills in how to remove yourself from an incident if necessary.

This report includes images of the activities that were covered, anonymising the participants where necessary.

Some of the discussion topics

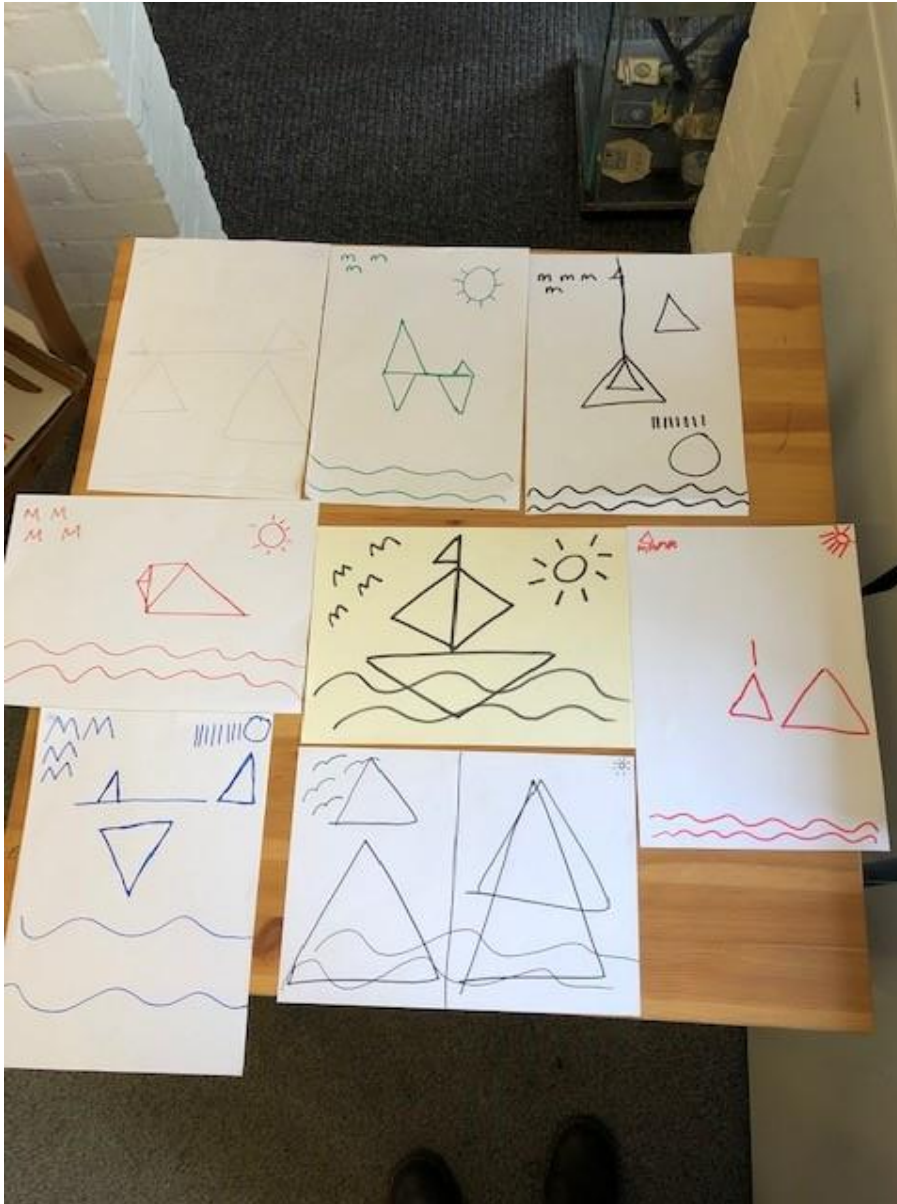


What people think we are.

What we really are.



What we would tell our younger self? What is Diversity?



This was a listening activity, to highlight diversity. Everyone was described the picture in the middle but all drew differently. This activity demonstrated how we all perceive things differently despite having the same instructions. The discussion continued on how important it is to understand the differences in the way we hear/see things from others.

The following images show some of the techniques shared by the Bjj instructors supporting the young women in getting out of holds, grips and other difficult situations they have found themselves in. Each week they requested to be taught new moves to help them feel more powerful and able to respond to different scenarios.



The young women were learning how to break fall and then get away if they were being held or attacked. They were also being taught how to use their bodies more effectively to kick out, how to get out of headlocks and escapes from being held down – as demonstrated in the next few images.







Evaluation and Feedback

At the end of each session the young women were asked to reflect on what they had taken part in and then feedback into the next session.

Every session the young women said they felt they had been able to participate positively and were always keen to come back for the next session.

During the programme they said:

“I will now call the police if I have an issue. There are others to look after you”

(participant A)

“I have learnt skills to help my friend if she is in trouble.”

(participant J)

“I know I can get support if I engage.”

(this refers to professionals)

(participant N)

All of those who took part demonstrated personal determination and added key skills to help them navigate difficult emotional and physical situations in life.



The young women were able to build their physical strength and grow in a safe emotional space where they freely discussed issues. The discussion space allowed the young women to support each other as they were all struggling with being in the care system so genuinely understood each other.

The young woman agreed that they were all now:

- More resilient
- Happier in themselves
- Able to defend themselves if necessary
- Able to get out of a physical situation
- Able to identify goals – one young woman used the goal setting activity to work out how she could afford a new car

During the programme two of the young women moved into independent living and went through a stressful incident when one of the baby's fathers found them. He was aggressive, stole one of the young women's phone and sent messages to professionals in her phone. It all ended safely and well because they called the police and said they used skills on the programme to manage the situation by being assertive and dealing with the problem immediately.

The practitioners delivering the programme also observed real positive change in the young women during the sessions.



Mama Bee practitioner Sam Hollier said:

"The young women came together to learn to build resilience and left holding their heads high with skills and new friendships. The programme gave them the opportunity to try physical safety in a safe space and explore emotions while avoiding negative and destructive decision making when angry."

Mama Bee practitioner Amber Preen said:

"Enabling this amazing group of young women to explore the use of methods to increase physical and emotional wellbeing has been an exciting process. To see this group grow in confidence and learn new skills for the future has been very rewarding for both young people and practitioners. Mama Bee is confident that the participants have benefitted from the strategies offered in the Assertive Behaviours Programme."

Brazilian Jiu Jitsu instructor Chris Cleere said:

"I was extremely happy to see how well the young woman who came to the programme engaged in the physical activities. It was great to hear the areas they wanted to work on and see their confidence increase over the weeks".



Future

Due to the success of this pilot Assertive Behaviours Programme, Mama Bee is in discussions with other Buckinghamshire providers to roll the programme out to meet the needs of all young people across the county.

The aim is to deliver the programme for the rest of 2019 and on throughout 2020 to meet the needs of as many young people as possible, reaching those not just in the care system but to offer the opportunity to all young people to feel empowered in their decision and confident in being able to safeguard themselves, mentally and physically.

Thanks go to the funders of this pilot programme, The William Harding and Thomas Hickman Trusts, without whom this first, of many, programmes would not have been possible.

Mama Bee is excited about the future of Assertive Behaviours and will continue to seek support from community funds to enable young people to access the sessions for free.



Information about Mama Bee

Mama Bee Group is a non-profit organisation created in March 2017 by Amber Preen, a qualified youth and community practitioner BA (Hons).

Mama Bee provides specialist services for young people and communities to tackle a range of social issues.

Mama Bee has a unique and collaborative approach in designing projects with young people that are an effective and innovative way of capturing the needs and ideas of participants.

The group has more than ten years' experience in meaningful participation and engagement and worked within a local authority setting (Buckinghamshire County Council Youth Service) for many years and engaged with hundreds of young people during that time.

All Mama Bee courses are young person led, this means the participants take control of the content and structure of the courses with the facilitators. This leads to more productive engagement and a sense of ownership for learning and development.

For more information about Mama Bee – www.mamabee.org.uk

Amber Preen 07904 705220



Appendix A

This gives a brief outline around what was covered in the sessions. At the end of each session there was time for the young women to build relationships and have a healthy snack break.

Session one we covered:

- Contract of behavior
- Discussion linked to exploring who we are?
- Discussion linked to life experiences.
- Where and what is a safe space while at the session

Physical work covered:

- Break falls
- Headlock
- Choke hold
- Punching

Session two we covered:

- Group contract reminder
- Communication and how we listen
- 2 truths 1 lie activity where we have to find out the one lie the other person is telling to demonstrate how well we can mask the truth when necessary
- Discussion around when we lie and why

Physical work covered:

- Break falls
- Headlock
- Punching
- Floor holds



Session three we covered:

- There was a lively discussion around diversity, what it meant and how it is relevant in our lives and communities.
- How we listen differently to others to the same set of instructions.

Physical work covered:

- Bear crawl
- Knee work and using windmill arms
- Punching
- Choke holds
- Grip and roll

Session four we covered:

- Goal setting – how to set a goal and what can hold us back or push us forward in succeeding
- There was an in-depth discussion around how 'one size does not fit all' when it comes to services trying to 'help' the young women
- There was a discussion on coercive control and how when people are only our friends if we have something such as money or food
- We looked at negativity and how it breeds negativity and how it seems young women are always trying to be 'one up' on others and why this may be.

Physical work covered:

- Grappling
- Holds
- Rolling



Session five we covered:

- A discussion around young parents looking at what others think but what the reality is.
- We looked at stereotypes – breastfeeding and how that makes the group feel, as well as mother and baby groups not being aimed for their age group and feeling like outsiders
- There was a discussion around being in a cycle of benefits

In this session there was no time for physical work as the young women spent the whole time discussing the way they felt about the way they were judged by others.

Session six we covered:

- What would you tell your younger self?
- A discussion around how we see people e.g. what does the perfect woman look like? and what does a suicide bomber look like?
- We looked at creating mantras for the young people to use in their lives
- We looked at how the media tells us to think one way when we might not agree but are not confident enough to argue with it as they must be right.
- Social services and the impact they can have on the young women's lives

This was the last session and the young women chose to not engage in any physical activity as they wanted to really talk about experiences in the last few weeks and how they felt more empowered as young women.