

2.1: A campaign by people with learning disabilities against violence and bullying of young people with learning disabilities in Europe

In 2000, the Scottish organization ENABLE worked with partners FENACERCI in Portugal and LEV in Denmark to develop and run a campaign against violence and bullying of young people with learning disabilities. Central to the work was the involvement of young people with learning disabilities from ENABLE's national committee of self-advocates, known as ACE. This 'anti-bullying working group' was involved at all stages of the production of materials and helped develop the messages.

Materials produced

- A series of anti-bullying posters was produced in English, Portuguese and Danish. The posters are visually very strong because they feature people with learning disabilities conveying a confident message with a hint of ironic humour: for example, one of them says "Gee thanks – I never noticed I had learning disabilities until you so kindly pointed it out". This underlines the fact that people with learning disabilities are not 'abnormal', so not expect to be treated differently from anyone else, and stand up for their rights with confidence, humour and dignity. One of the young men on the English language poster, Mark McLennan, also participated in the launch events of the campaign and became quite a media celebrity! The slogan of the campaign was "Open your mind, not your mouth", again a slogan that has a touch of ironic humour and is very much created with young people in mind.
- The project also produced a simple guide for people with learning disabilities who are being bullied, to help them to know how to respond. The guide was produced in English.

How the materials were put together

- The **target group** was children in schools, since this is where bullying often takes place and where those who bully (even outside school) are likely to hear the message. Since the campaign was aimed at school children, it was important that the message would appeal to them. ENABLE, which took the lead role, consulted with a focus group of school children from two high schools in Scotland to test various messages and images and gauge reactions and responses. They also spoke to experts from a government-funded agency, the Anti-Bullying Network, to find out what kind of messages had been used with this target group in the past and what had worked.
- The **message** of the campaign was spread across two essential elements: the slogan "Open your mind, not your mouth" was direct and called for a response from those reading it. The second message was more complex: it comprises visual identification of a young person who has learning disabilities, and then a positive response to this person through the humour of the line suggesting that the reader has pointed out to the young person on the poster something s/he knew already, thank you very much. This is a clever way of engaging the reader in a 'conversation' with the young person in the poster, already breaking down the barriers that may exist between them. Reinforcing this 'relationship' by involving one of the young people from the posters in the campaign, so that he became truly someone that people saw, heard and effectively got to know, rather than just an image on a poster, was very effective.
- The **format** differed for the different language versions. While ENABLE produced posters, for example, the Danish partner chose to make postcards with the same idea/message. Once you have a strong visual idea and message/slogan, it is important to decide the best format

for reproducing these. Clearly posters are useful for this target group because they can be put on notice boards in schools and can also be used in other places where young people gather, such as sports clubs or discos. Postcards can be distributed to young people and can be used as bookmarks for school texts, or in other ways.

- ***Quantities produced:*** 20,000 posters and 100,000 leaflets were produced by the Scottish partner alone. Postcards and posters were sent to every school and education department in Scotland, Denmark and Portugal, so that there was comprehensive coverage of the target group. In Scotland materials were also distributed to local authorities, social work departments and health boards.
- ***Other issues:*** The involvement of young people with learning disabilities in this project was crucial. Not only were they involved in all stages of the production of the posters and leaflet, they helped to develop the slogan 'Open your minds, not your mouth'. Their personal experience of the reactions of other people was fundamental to developing a slogan that would prompt an appropriate reaction.

The project also included a three-day conference in Scotland for people with learning disabilities from the three partner groups. At this conference there were workshops to support better understanding of what bullying is and how to respond to it. The participants were able to talk about their experiences of being bullied, and were trained to visit schools with supporters to speak to small groups of children. In Scotland this was so successful that requests from schools for visits far exceeded the capacity of the project to fill the requests. The conference also resulted in the production of the leaflet 'Are you being bullied?', which was written and illustrated by people with learning disabilities from all three countries. This has proved so successful that it is now being reproduced in more languages.

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A few comments:

- The Danish version of the campaign material was distributed as a postcard rather than a poster – once you have a strong idea, you can reproduce it in the form best suited to the target group you are trying to reach, and to the best way of reaching them.
- This particular campaign focused on promoting understanding and tolerance of people with learning disabilities, who are often misunderstood and labelled as 'different' -- and 'difference' always makes people vulnerable to violence and exclusion. You could adapt this simple campaign for other groups who are at risk of being marginalized and threatened – for example people with physical disabilities, minority ethnic groups such as Roma or refugee communities, old people living in 'young' communities, or young people living in 'old' communities... Remember that involving the group in the project is not only an empowering activity for them but will also help you to create more effective messages and materials as you learn from their direct experience. If you decide to involve members of the group directly in promotional work, make sure that they are willing and able to undertake this responsibility – do not give out their names, personal details or other identifying information unless they specifically agree to that and understand what such 'personality publicity' will mean. They will also need your ongoing support if they become identified with the campaign. [We would like to thank Mark McLennan for giving his permission to use his 'identity' in the Daphne Library.]

Graphics references

- [2.1 Gee thanks poster.jpg](#)
- [2.1 Clever ones poster.jpg](#)
- [2.1 Congratulations expert poster.jpg](#)
- [2.1 Insult passion poster.jpg](#)
- [2.1 Bullying leaflet cover.jpg](#)
- [2.1 Campaign postcard Denmark.jpg](#)