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## Overcoming barriers in the classroom and on the airwaves

### Local students connect with Jovik Radio to produce and record show about their favourite York spots

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*Listen to Applefields School students recommend their favourite spots in York*

For three months, 11 students and their teacher worked on the “Jorvik Radio Project”—a project that would transform their view of work, radio, media and themselves.

Applefields School, located in York, is a school for secondary aged students with a wide range of learning difficulties. It also promotes independence and communication for their young people.

Emily Pilmoor, a special educational needs teacher at the school, was responsible for creating the “Jorvik Radio Project” and supporting the students through its various stages.

Applefields also focuses on equipping students with everyday life and work-related skills. “So this is how we got into this project, it was a part of our work-related learning sessions,” she explains.

With the Jorvik Radio station located just a two-minute walk from the school, Emily felt this was a great opportunity to link with the station and introduce the students to working in radio.

“Learning about what people do on the radio is completely different to doing it and experiencing it,” she explained to her class.

“Doing a little project and having that real life experience is what our school is all about...Me stood in front of the class telling them this is what radio presenters do and letting them listen to the radio presenters is completely different to them going up there and planning it, recording it and then listening back.”

Bill Colman, Jorvik Radio’s managing director, immediately got on board with the idea.

“[Emily] got in touch with me and I said it will make a wonderful project,” says Bill. “I gave them some ideas for something that we wanted doing...and that was to do some research about radio listening habits, between the teachers and the parents.”

Emily and the students got to work.

“The thing with our students is that it’s hard for them to see the longevity of something,” she says. To make the project more manageable for everyone, they spread the work over several months, dedicating a few hours each week to a different aspect of media and radio.

Before creating and recording a radio show, the students first researched the various radio stations in the area and learned how to plan and conduct market research.

Together they designed a survey to understand the listening habits amongst adults in the community.

“[They] asked people when they listen to the radio and what they liked listening to,” says Emily. “Then they understood that if you listen to people and give them what they want, then that is the perfect sort of harmony.”

Nearly 100 people completed the survey including parents, teachers, taxi drivers as well as organisers and leaders of various clubs the students are involved in.

From the data, the students found that people liked hearing about things related to their local community. They decided to theme their radio show around this idea.

“So each person sort of decided on something that they love and [thought about] what it meant to them.” The class chose to talk about clubs, shops, cafés and museums in York. “It really had to be personal, in order for them to do it and enjoy it.”

Unable to meet in person, the students presented their results to Bill over Zoom.

Emily wanted the students’ recordings to sound as natural as possible. “I wrote down what they said in their presentation, which then formed their script for the radio, and then we just began sort of practicing that.”

With the project having been delayed several times due to Covid, Emily and the students managed to record in the studio just days before school finished for the summer holidays.

“No trips are allowed in the last week of school, but I was like begging my head teacher like, ‘please let us.’ We’d done everything up to it.”

“I really can’t say how much planning really went into every little fine detail.” She describes the various times that the project was stopped and delayed due to changing restrictions. “You know, it really did take us three months to do a five minute radio show.”

Though the project focused on media and work related skills, “it was also about helping the young people’s communication,” says Emily.

“I have a couple of students that have speech language and communication needs. So in terms of their sort of the way that they verbalize things, they found it a bit tricky and, you know they’ve been quite embarrassed and not very confident in the way that they speak...but because of the slow pace of this project, they really understood what they were doing and they really felt passionate about it.”

Ultimately, it was the passion for these places and wanting to tell people about them which propelled the students forward and helped many of them overcome communication barriers.

According to Emily, “that sort of drove them and made them just say, ‘right I’m just gonna do it and I’m not gonna give up.’”

With careful planning, all the students were able to take a tour of the station and record their show with the support of Matt Lloyd, Jorvik Radio’s station manager and Breakfast Show presenter.

“They were absolutely brilliant,” exclaims Bill with a huge smile. “And they took to it like ducks to water.”

Of the 11 students involved in the project, eight of them were able to record in the studio. “There were a couple [of students] that were just too overwhelmed... Everybody had a go at practicing it, but for some of them it just was too much.”

Despite not everyone being able to record, Emily was clear that all 11 students successfully completed the project. “Everybody sort of found part of the project that suited them and that they really enjoyed. It gave everyone an opportunity to shine in different places.”

For Emily, the best part of the project was being in the classroom with her students and listening to their final recording live on air.

“We got the message from Matt saying that it’s on the radio. I was like right, let’s drop it, let’s go, let’s listen.”

The class, as well as several staff that popped into the room to listen, were giddy with excitement to hear their voices on the radio. “You could see them just grinning and grinning. It was just massive.”

“It’s really hard for our young people to sort of follow big projects through and to really keep motivated throughout them...But to actually do it, and finish it and hear it was just the best part. I mean they just couldn’t believe it was them.”

As for the parents, “[they] were just hugely overwhelmed,” Emily recalls. After holding a listening party with over 150 people in attendance, several parents approached her to say how they never knew their child could speak so clearly.

Emily explains that all the students got something different out of the project. “For some people it meant the world. They thought, ‘This is what I want to do. I want to work in the media. I want to be on the radio.’ And then for other people it was just a lovely experience and the confidence and improved communication they got from it was just amazing.”

For some of the students, their wish to continue working in radio was immediately realised when they were asked if they could record additional voiceovers for the Breakfast Show.

“It was a great thing to be involved with. Great for the school, great for the students, great for Jorvik Radio and our listeners. It’s all about giving our community a voice on the radio,” explains Bill.

To Emily, the project fulfilled all of their expectations—from learning about working in media to improving communication skills. But it was the experience that is going to stick with the students for a long time—experiences that she is keen to replicate in other ways to prepare each student for their future as best she can.

Written by Rebecca Mendoza