



The Liverpool Comino Centre

As Education Fellow for the Comino Centre, Eric Bates strongly believed that GRASP was not only an excellent process to help one to achieve better results, but by continual application it remains subconsciously in one's mind to be used as a matter of course in every day thinking. He was concerned that Comino Centres should help ensure that young people accepted personal responsibility by using GRASP, and counter balance the ever present emphasis on personal rights. In 1993 Rita Marsh, who had been Director of the Liverpool Education Authority's curriculum, accreditation and development unit, worked with Eric to set up the fifth GRASP Comino Centre in the Department of Education in the University of Liverpool. The Centre concentrated in promoting GRASP as a process for making the introduction of the new General Vocational Qualifications more effective.

When Rita Marsh retired in 1997 as Director of the Comino Centre in Liverpool University and it was agreed to move the Centre to Liverpool John Moores University under the direction of Professor Les Bell. Subsequently Ros Phillips was appointed as Director and she led the Centre until her retirement in 2008, when Professor Diana Burton became Centre Director. The focus of the John Moores Comino Centre was supporting initiatives which addressed social disadvantage in the Liverpool area. In the relationship with Local Solutions, they identified Homeground as a key unit and the Comino Centre provided Homeground with funding for a pilot project. Homeground was subsequently funded directly by the Comino Foundation whilst the funding for the Comino Centre was used for numerous other action research projects focusing on local community issues.

For instance, the Comino Foundation was impressed by the success of a project funded by the Gordon Cook Foundation in South Wales in which the TAN Dance Company had worked with Swansea school children, using dance to help them make the transition from primary to secondary school. The Liverpool Comino Centre was excited by the idea of using dance as a way of helping young people build their confidence and capacity for self expression. This was the trigger for an experimental partnership in which the Comino Centre brought together Local Solutions and an undergraduate community dance company from John Moores University. Young people with a range of disadvantages were given the chance to be involved in an art and dance project in which, over several months, they explored and expressed their personal identity. The project culminated in a live performance and a DVD. Over the weeks of preparation for the performance, it became clear that both the students and Local Solutions clients were learning from each other and were enriched by the experience of working together through dance.

So successful was this experiment, that it has become established as an annual project involving other Liverpool agencies which work with disadvantaged young people. By 2010, the numbers of young people taking part had increased to around 100, supported by 20 students from John Moores University. As well as Homeground, other organisations involved were the Liverpool Light House Project, which supports excluded young people from various schools in the area; Save the Family, a supported housing and homeless project; and the Liverpool Pupil Referral Unit for excluded young people from various schools in the area.

When the Comino Foundation trustees decided that, as part of their regular strategic review of funding, they would cease to fund the Liverpool Comino Centre at the end of the academic year 2010-2011, they made this decision knowing that links between Liverpool John Moores University and its local community were firmly established and that the university is fully committed to continuing its community engagement programme. The person to contact at Liverpool John Moores University regarding the Centre's previous work and current activities is Professor Diane Burton, Pro Vice Chancellor (Delivery) (email: d.m.burton@ljmu.ac.uk)