

Aspirations and Challenges Inspire Longhill High Students

More than 90 students from Longhill High's year 9 spent a truly inspiring day at the Amex stadium last week. The event, entitled 'Be the Change' was part of a ground-breaking, inspirational programme run by Love Local Jobs and supported by local business representatives who offered their guidance and expertise to the students.

The 'Be the Change' programme focuses on happiness, confidence, hope, relationships and employability and encourages students to identify their personal barriers to success and help them to find ways of overcoming those barriers. Business mentors worked closely with the students, encouraging them to share some of their own personal struggles with the audience, as well as sharing some of their own experiences of school and growing up.

Student Toby, aged 13, talked about the day. "I didn't really know what to expect, but the speaker asked anyone who had been bullied to stand up; I stood up and was asked to tell my story. I didn't really want to, but I decided to do it anyway. People came up to me later, other students, who didn't know about my life outside school and they were really surprised. It made people realise that sometimes things they say, even in a joking way, can upset someone else because of things that are happening to them in their lives. I think it gave other students a better understanding of what other people might be going through."

Did Toby think the day was beneficial? "Oh yes it was. I felt much better after talking to everyone. It was hard because it was very emotional. In the break, other students said that I'd made them cry and I was surprised, probably because it's the life I live every day, but it's good that they have a better understanding now."

Student Spencer, also aged 13, also stood up to tell his story. "People were surprised to learn that I'd been bullied, both because of my heritage and because of being transgender. A lot of people said they didn't realise that I was. I think I'm very lucky to be part of such an accepting community, living in Brighton, compared to living in other parts of the country. For young people who are already questioning a lot of things, it is good to be part of an accepting community and not in a toxic environment. Students that I'd never spoken to before came up to me in the break. It really broke down barriers between us on both sides."

Students were encouraged to look at themselves from a different viewpoint, to focus on their strengths and to be confident in those strengths and abilities. Inspirational speaker Graham Moore really impressed the students; "You could hear a pin drop while he was speaking – everybody listened. He showed us how to believe that we are smart, even though we might not have thought we were. Even if not academically, we are all smart in our own ways."

As to their future aspirations, Spencer and Toby both have clear ideas of what they would like to do. "I would love to be a rugby player and an actor", Toby said, "I have goals and I want to reach the top." Spencer has aspirations to become an illustrator, "I love drawing and making stories, so I'd like to write and illustrate comic books. I also love music and want to pursue that too."

It sounds as though 'Be the Change' has really inspired our students and we would like to thank the Amex and Love Local Jobs, as well as Head of Year 9, Miss Ellis, for organising such a fantastic day.

