

# Bigfoot Summer Transition School

## Acton High School

**23/07/2018 - 27/07/2018**

### ***Returning for another year!***

This year I had the pleasure of working as an Assistant Facilitator and Coordinator at Bigfoot's Summer Transition School, taking place at Acton High School, with two of Bigfoot's senior facilitators, Adrian and Sophie. Each year the Summer School has returned for one week, and this year we took ownership of the superbly spacious main school hall, with doors opening out onto the field for further room to use.

One of the benefits of the Summer School taking place in the school hall is that the children got to experience their new school, adapting to the new surroundings and resources open to them in September. For many of the children, their Primary Schools were much smaller than Acton High, so being able to familiarise themselves with their new school was a really good way of it becoming less overwhelming.

### ***What we aim to do...***

The main aim of the week is to ensure the transition from Primary to Secondary School is as smooth as possible, and to try and soften any concerns the students may have about moving school. Simone Stocks, who works at Acton High, is a great supporter of the project. She has witnessed, first hand, the long lasting affects of the Summer School, and has witnessed students flourish throughout the duration of the week, and therefore have the confidence to transition into their new school with ease.

The support given by Simone, is evidently felt by the returning director of the Summer School, Adrian, who stated *"...as always the support from Stocksy [her nickname for the week!] is incredible"* As such, Simone and the other facilitators work incredibly well together. Moreover, it was evident that this bond between them helps the children to feel safe in their care and leadership, with parents commenting that the facilitators were *"very easy to get along with"* and *"approachable"*. Ibraheem's mother stated *"my son said he felt like he could be himself straight away"*.

### ***'Get to know you's'...***

We began the week with a sit down discussion about any concerns the students may have, for example, meeting new people and making friends, or struggling academically. We also discussed any elements of the transition that they are excited about, like new adventures, excelling in their home work, and enjoying going to school in a new, bigger building, with new facilities.

We wanted to ensure the group worked cohesively throughout the week, and supported each other. Thus forming new friendship groups that would become a ready made support system, for when they start school in September. The group was smaller and more intimate this year, with eighteen students in total. From day one, the students formed close friendship groups, and the group also worked well together as a whole.

An example of this immediate connection was when one of the students, Harmony, left the room, on her return she noticed a new game had begun, and she had missed the instructions. Without hesitation, her fellow student, Sanchez, came forward to explain the rules to her, so that she could be involved. They had known each other for a couple of hours, so it was really impressive to see them supporting each other so well!

We used the first day as a 'get to know you' session, using various introductory games to help bond the group and observe how the students worked with each other. It was interesting to see the natural leadership that occurred, as such, some students volunteered themselves as the problem solvers; happy to make decisions. For example, Igor, helped the others to win the game, and encouraged a discussion of tactics!

Sophie, our Assistant Director, stated "*I think they were the most focussed group we've had*" a statement I firmly agree with. The focus was immense, they were always listening and taking on board the instructions, respecting what the facilitators had to say, and executing all new games with ease. For example, we played a game of 'Werewolf' at the end of the day on Monday, an hour long game, requiring a high level of attention, listening skills, and patience. At no point did we lose any focus, they stayed on task, and committed to the rules throughout.

### ***Behaviour Management...***

Often the second day can start to become more challenging for the facilitator, as the students have become more relaxed, and feel more confident to test the boundaries with regards to rules that have been implemented on the first day. As such, there were a few signs of students challenging the rules. However, Adrian very eloquently placed a sense of trust and respect in the students, asking them to work with him, rather than against him. Demonstrating and establishing the kind of behaviour he was expecting. He asked them to challenge themselves to behave better, to act with a higher level of maturity. Highlighting the reality that they are transferring to a school where there will be older children, and come September, a certain level of maturity will be expected. It was evident that the students began to think more carefully about their ways of behaving.

Another decision made by Sophie and Adrian that enhanced behaviour, was to mix up the group dynamic by putting students in groups with others whom they wouldn't normally work with, but who would compliment their personality. For example, Sanchez, had a tendency to go off task, and his energy was very high, which would sometimes affect his focus and commitment in an exercise. Therefore, Adrian and Sophie paired him with Idris, who's calm nature helped to focus Sanchez. Consequently, it ensured the group were naturally led by Idris, and in turn were more committed to the task.

### ***Devising the Final Showcase...***

We used this day to begin creating work that would be used in the final showcase. My main highlight of the day was when we created the Banraku Puppets. The students worked together, in groups, to make the Puppets out of masking tape and newspaper. The collective attention of the group was a pleasure to observe, they listened to Sophie as she led the creation of the Puppets, following her step by step instructions.

The next step was to make the Puppets move, and as Sophie said, "*to bring them to life!*". The students had to work carefully in their teams, making sure to coordinate their movements, so that the puppet moved smoothly. A particularly engaging moment, was when Idris, Josh, and Alex, managed to make their Puppet perform a back flip. It was so intricately performed, ensuring they engaged with how each group member operated the Puppet, the composure and cooperation of the group was outstanding.

On the same day we also worked with Trestle Masks, exploring different physicality and emotion, using the expressions on the Masks. It was a real pleasure to hear groups of students discussing their interpretation of the Mask's expression, and working together so well to grasp the technique required for Mask work. The stand out moment from this task, was when Sasha was reluctant to perform her pose to the rest of the group. She froze. At this point, her fellow students encouraged her to give it go, installing a sense of confidence in her. She turned around, placed the mask on her face, and struck her pose, it was such a delight to see the group coming together to motivate Sasha.

On the third day, Adrian taught the students the song they would perform at the final Showcase, 'This is Me' from 'The Greatest Showman'. It was a delight to watch them pick up the melody and lyrics so quickly, with some stronger singers, namely Aimee, naturally taking the lead, and helping the other students to learn the song. For many of the students this was one of their highlights, with Sanchez commenting that he "loved singing together" something he may later choose to pursue as a hobby!

We also created Tableaux based on the joys and concerns discussed earlier on in the week, devising 'Best Day' and 'Worst Day' scenarios. It was incredibly beneficial for the students to explore these topics practically, as an extension of discussing it earlier on. Some students, such as Alena, displayed a natural talent for performing, as she was particularly watchable and dynamic throughout this task.

On the penultimate day, we created T-Shirts, enabling the students to make something personal, a trademark design all of their own, and a memento of the week.

On the final day, we had a final few rehearsals, but not much was needed, as the students had quickly picked up the necessary skills to execute the Puppets, Masks and Tableaux. To the delight of the students, we could use the day to finish as we started, more games!

### ***Individual achievements...***

Theo began the week, frequently going off task. He would often walk off and curl into a ball. Not completing the task, and only being able to engage in it for a short amount of time. It was a worry that he wouldn't be able to attend the rest of the week, we wondered whether he was enjoying himself, as he wasn't engaging with many of his fellow students, or with the activities. After a discussion with Theo and his mother, we attained a better understanding of Theo's situation and character, and worked out a way of moving forward, establishing a way of meeting his needs; asking him to inform us if he felt he needed to step out of the task.

By the end of the week, he was able to commit to tasks for much longer, and worked well with particular students who engaged with him and understood his way of learning. Theo's mother commented that she *"...was very happy to hear that he joined in a lot of the activities, he generally doesn't take part so much in activities at school...He said he loved it"* and also stated *"...thank you for how you dealt with both Theo and me when he wasn't cooperating"*. Theo had 100% attendance for the week.

To conclude, it was a joy to be part of the Summer Transition School Team at Acton High School. The power of the Performing Arts in bringing people together, has proved more true than ever. It has allowed the students to bond through play. In fact, although the Showcase was a triumph, and it was a pleasure for the students to show their friends and family what they had achieved, it became evident that the process of putting the Showcase together, was far more valuable than the final Showcase itself. As such, it gave the students a project to work towards together and to build relationships with each other along the way. Parents stated their children were *"excited to come back every day"* and *"make new friends"* that they *"particularly enjoyed the Drama!"*

A stand out comment from Scarlett's mother was that *"they [Adrian and Sophie] remembered my son from the year before. Very inspiring, and both years have achieved what they set out to do."*

Evidence that the affects of the Bigfoot Summer Transition School last longer than the five days in the week it takes place...