

If your parents have never worked for a living, why should you?

That's the question Fliss Abraham tried to answer for a group of Bristol school children.

She took on the task after volunteering for a Civil Service Local project called 'Inspiring Young People' in primary schools.

"The Government is doing this as a lot of children have parents or grandparents who have never worked," said Fliss.

"I thought it would be a useful activity to help with collaborative working and working with new people in a different environment, and expanding my experience of public speaking.

"In effect, I was doing a training event for 10-year-olds. It was quite a challenge to pitch it at the right level to keep them engaged."

To start with, Fliss and the other willing helpers met co-ordinator Valerie Cobbin, who was surprised at the lack of volunteers and asked everyone why they thought this might be so.

"The feeling was that people might be afraid of getting up in front of a class," Fliss explained.

At the initial meeting, the volunteers were split into teams. Fliss was assigned to Fair Furlong Primary School in Withywood with Valerie and also Simon Little, from the Environment Agency, to speak to a class of 25 children.

No script was provided. The only guidance Valerie gave was that presenters should use visual aids rather than just "talk at" the children. So Fliss enlisted the help of Gary Lloyd, who produced laminated A4 cards for the event.

Fliss and her fellow presenters started by talking about their own jobs - what they did, why they enjoyed it and the benefits they gained.

They then each took a group of children so they could talk about three subjects: travelling to work; what you wear; and the benefits of working.

The laminated pictures were used to encourage the children to relate to that topic in the workplace and think about questions such as:

Why is it important to consider how you travel to work?

Why should you think about what you wear?

Why is it good to work?

Fliss said: "My group were really keen to write their answers on the flipchart paper and feed back their ideas to the rest of class."

Practical benefits discussed included salary, holiday and sick pay, getting equipment (such as a mobile phone or a car), pension, training and flexible hours (such as term time or part time). And there were personal benefits, too, such as increased confidence.

The children were asked what things they would spend their earnings on. These included “boring stuff” such as paying for rent and food, but also fun things, such as a laptop.

Fliss said the children were very keen to participate.

“I asked each child if they knew what job they wanted to do and each child put their hand up.”

Answers included the police, army, computer games designer and hairdresser. One wanted to run her own beauty salon. Another wanted to be a cleaner because his dad was a cleaner.

“The most unexpected thing was how enthusiastic the children were.”

Fliss said they showed a lot of maturity, a reflection of their teacher’s encouragement.

As part of her session, Fliss involved two of the children in a role play about mediation. She asked them to think about a role within the school that was similar to that of a mediator, and they said playground buddy. So she encouraged them to consider what a playground buddy might be asked to do, such as patch things up between two friends who had fallen out.

“I found it a really enjoyable experience. I came away on a real high that it had gone so well and the kids had enjoyed it so much. I got a lot of positive feedback.”

That sentiment was echoed by Fair Furlong teacher Christian Lang, who said: “The presentations were well received by the children. The workshop sessions were well thought-out and engaging.

“We are planning to continue, as part of our PSHE, to discuss and work on aspirations for work and the skill/mindsets that enable success.”

And project co-ordinator Valerie Cobbin said: “It was great to see the children really enjoying Fliss and Simon’s session, and we’ve had excellent feedback from everyone involved. The children kept us on our toes throughout the session and I would recommend getting involved with this to anyone.”

The project will be rolled out to other primary schools and Fliss hopes to participate in future.

If you want to be involved, contact Valerie Cobbin on 03000 543370 or valerie.cobbin@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk