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Summary

This work focuses on the benefits of a professional graphic facilitator to gather the dreams and aspirations of groups of year 9 and 10 students with learning difficulties and disabilities.

We wanted to see if using a graphic advocate would help us to explore the dreams and aspirations of this group of students – in a more interesting way than just talking to them. We wanted to engage the students and encourage them to “dream big”.

The idea was to see if common aspirations could inform curriculum planning at the local College of Further Education (FE). The outcomes showed identifiable patterns in the aspirations of the young people which included ambitions to travel abroad and learning to drive, as high priorities.

The information will be used to inform the curriculum at New College Stamford and the work the young people did was also taken back to their schools for use in lessons, Person Centred reviews and transition planning.

Due to the success of this approach, 15 staff are now to be trained to be able to run sessions themselves.

Key lessons learned

- Use of graphics encouraged the young people to share their dreams and aspirations
- For this to succeed, it was vital that students were encouraged to ‘dream big’ – no matter how ‘wacky’ staff might find those initial dreams.
- Young people with learning difficulties and disabilities clearly have as many big dreams as their peers – a lot of which are similar.

- Common themes were identified in the aspirations of the learners and these will be used to change the curriculum
- The fact the workshops were carried out with years 8 and 9 allows time for the College to modify the curriculum to match some of the key aspirations of the group
- This approach works best when it was made into an 'event' – a day out with lunch rather than just the length of a normal lesson
- The room was important – it worked best in large room with lots of wall space
- Support staff are needed to work with the students in small groups and the enthusiasm of these staff is reflected in the quality of the results – it is vital that they do not comment on the feasibility of the learners' aspirations.
- It is best to have homogenous groups of students in terms of general ability - we did not mix groups of learners with profound and complex needs with those with more moderate learning disabilities
- The resources produced should be used by school staff to inform further work and transition planning based on the learner's aspirations
- We identified that learners had aspirations that previously we didn't know about and therefore we haven't always been responding to their interests, something we can now address.

Introduction

About organisations involved

All the providers serve a mainly rural area and are situated at the southernmost point of Lincolnshire, with one based just of the border in Rutland. Several of the providers have an intake of students from several counties.

Provider names and Sector coverage

- New College Stamford – a general college of further education with a designated specialist provision for 70 learners
- Queen Eleanor School – mainstream secondary
- Willoughby School – Special School
- Wild's Lodge – Independent Special school for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD)
- Garth School – Special School
- Priory School – Special School for Moderate Learning Difficulties
- Sense College – Independent Specialist Provider
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What we wanted to explore

We wanted to find a more imaginative and creative way to help learners share dreams and aspirations. We felt that often these conversations are 'boring' to students and influenced by what they think staff or parents expect of them.

This is reflected in the fact that the dreams and aspirations that learners with learning difficulties and disabilities often say they have, are often lower than their neuro typical peers. Is it really the case that these learners don't have big dreams?

The intended outcomes were:

- 1.To investigate the effectiveness of graphic facilitation as a vehicle for exploring aspirations
- 2.To ascertain whether there were any patterns in the aspirations of the young people that could be used to inform the local F.E provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Implementation

Planning our approach

- The LSIS Specialist Provider provided a list of names of graphic facilitators (several can also be found on Google)
- New College Stamford researched the facilitators, chose one and organised the event
- All members of the cluster were invited to participate – it was decided to have Queen Eleanor school (mainstream) and Wild's Lodge, a school for children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) together in one group and the other schools in a second group, so that learners were more alike in learning styles.
- The graphic facilitator supplied her own materials but a room with bare wall space is needed.
- Evaluation of the aspirations to be undertaken by New College Stamford, evaluation of the method and event to be undertaken by all involved.

What we did

Identified the graphic facilitator we wanted to use by looking at various people's work on line.

The larger group of learners came in for a whole day including a lunch. The other group of learners came for the morning – based on the feeling that they would find a whole day too long.

The day started with the graphic facilitator writing and drawing a schedule for the day then the rules of the sessions.

The learners then gave suggestions for the lives of two imaginary people – one male , one female – both a large drawing and the attributes suggested were added to the drawings.

The learners started with their dreams – these could be as big and abstract as they wanted. These were then drawn onto the wall (see example at the end of this case study) by students and the facilitator.

The next step was to turn the dreams into goals – the learners were asked to think about what they needed to do to reach their dreams – these were again drawn onto the wall.

Each learner completed a sheet with their own dream and goals to take with them.

Outcomes and impacts

What we achieved

- Key trends in learners' dreams and goals were identified (specifically the desire for foreign travel and taking steps towards learning to drive) and we have started to add these things into the curriculum.
- Feedback from learners said it encouraged them to think about their futures and that they found it much easier to do this with the use of graphics
- Feedback from school staff said it had been positive and that the information could be used in schools.

What we learned

- Important to have groups of learners of similar abilities
- The engagement and attitude of support staff was key – recognising that all dreams are allowed
- The work was better conducted as an 'event' including a visit to the college and a lunch.
- The room used is important – space is needed and lots of bare walls
- Feedback shows that staff learnt how to help learners convert their large dreams into more realistic goals, allowing learners to maintain their dreams.
- The learners from the mainstream school and Wild's Lodge were more reluctant to share their dreams and to draw them themselves on the wall – more encouragement from their support staff was needed.

What we are taking forward

- The curriculum is being modified following learners' aspirations
- We are holding a training day for 15 staff to train them in graphic facilitation
- Discussions are currently underway about making the graphic facilitation in New College Stamford a yearly event for local year 8 and 9 students with learning difficulties and or disabilities.
- We are discussing how this work can be used to inform and challenge parents.

How we are sharing it

- Other colleges, schools and professionals from the Local Authority have been offered places on the training day.

What advice we would give to others

- Source a suitable venue
- Discuss with support staff beforehand to ensure they understand that learners are allowed to express any dreams, however ambitious or 'off the wall' as these can later become realistic goals.
- Make the activity into an exciting event for learners.

Further reading

<http://scriberia.co.uk/what-is-graphic-facilitation/> - Scriberia: explains what graphic facilitation is

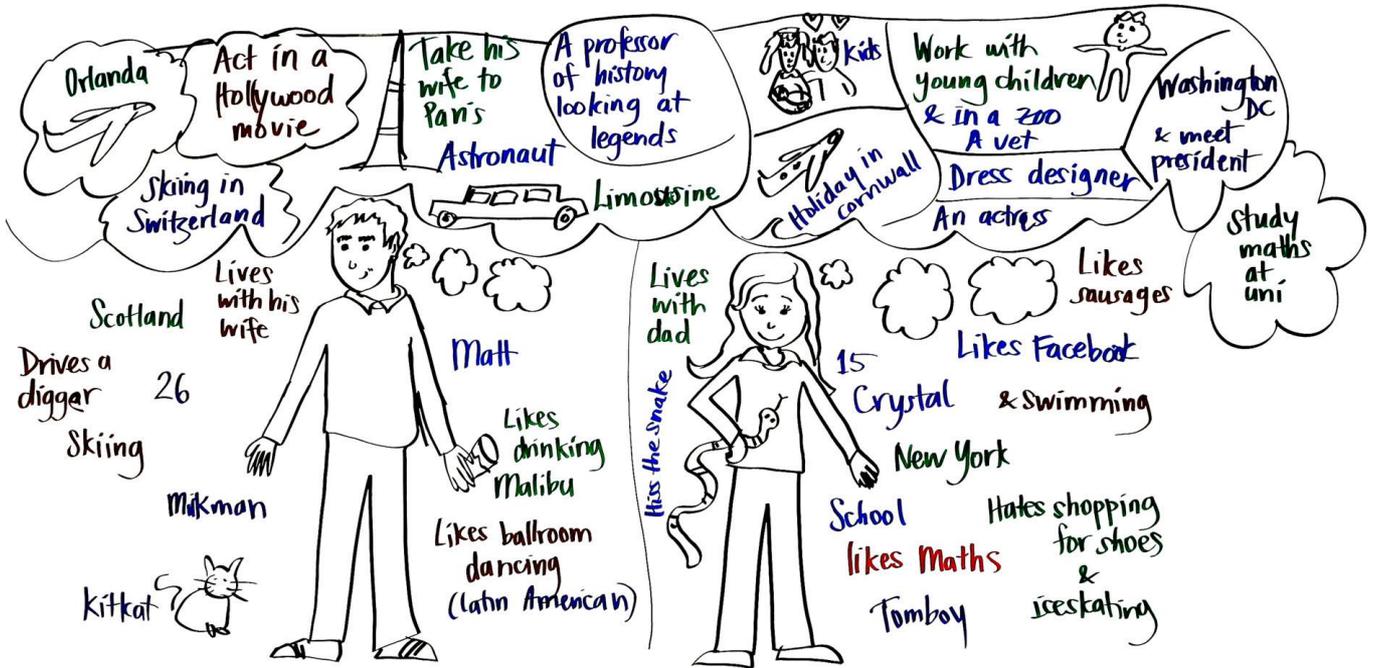
Two Graphic Facilitators:

www.penmendonca.com Pen Mendocca

Google 'Yvie George' Yvie George

Written by:

Amanda Hana, New College Stamford. Contact: amanda.hana@stamford.ac.uk.
Telephone: 01780 484379



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