



Where are they now?

Sandgate School, Kendal

Summary

Our project revisited the pathway of three learners with severe or profound needs, on leaving the school at nineteen, through to college, and back into their local community again. Young adults and their parents were interviewed regarding their hopes and aspirations, and their current reality on returning to the community. This work is part of the wider 'Live Local' theme developed by the Cumbria Cluster group.

Key lessons learned

Through undertaking this activity we gained an understanding of the impact of current overall policy at a local level, developing a clearer picture of the issues facing the local area in relation to the implementation of forthcoming government policy, especially in relation to the provision of work and homes for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities. Although the work has been small scale, wider anecdotal knowledge does support our conclusions. The study shows:

- The desire of participants to live independently within their local communities has not been met to date. Although some local growth within Kendal will be achieved imminently, current and future demand is likely to outstrip this provision.
- The desire of participants to work, and be involved in meaningful activity, has only partially been met.
- The desire of participants for a social life with friends of a similar age, and a wider range of social opportunities, has only partially been met.
- College was, without dispute, described as a positive experience, which had created access to new skills, created an environment in which to mature and, overall, has led to great personal growth. Return to the participants' local communities however had not, at the time of writing, created an avenue for continuing development and personal growth in the above key areas.

Introduction

About Sandgate school

Sandgate School is an all age special school for children and young people aged between three and nineteen years of age who have severe and profound learning needs. Historically, almost all young people leaving the school at aged nineteen have moved on to independent specialist residential colleges, with only one leaver destination being the local College of Further Education (FE). The school is based in Kendal in the South Lakes area, covering a wide catchment area, which features pockets of rural deprivation. Limited transport links from rural communities to towns hinder access to services and opportunities.

What we wanted to explore

- to gain an insight into the aspirations of young adult leavers at Sandgate
- to see how their aspirations were met at college

- to see how their aspirations have been met on their transition back into their local community post college

Summary of the activity

- With impending changes due to personal budgets, the requirement in statute to identify the local offer, and the emphasis on better work opportunities, there was a desire to identify, specifically, 'how this was working' currently.
- A number of ex-students were identified, with a variety of backgrounds, needs, and age. All ex-students were either in their final year at college, or had returned from college to their local community over the past five years.
- The higher-level teaching assistant (HTLA) responsible for transition, (a member of school staff known to them), visited the young people at home. She carried out interviews with a set of structured, but open-ended, questions. Information gained was to have a dual purpose; on one level, to elicit specific information with which to influence higher level strategic discussion, and secondly, to create 'biopics' which could be used on our learning platform so current young people at Sandgate, and their parents, could consider the pathways of others when considering their own journey.

Implementation

The first stage of the study was implemented over a six month period between January and June 2013.

Planning our approach

- The Sandgate team involved in the work were identified: Head teacher, Higher Level Teaching assistant, and 6th form teacher, with feed through to governors/other staff at relevant points.
- A briefing paper was drafted and discussed between the above, with specific tasks across the project identified, for example, consent paperwork, interview questions, means of recording interviews, and so on.
- i-PAD technology was used to record interviews to enable accurate transfer
- The intention was to gain information which could be used for local leverage, and also inform current young people within the school

What we did

- The 'on the ground' work was undertaken by the HLTA, involving direct phone contact and visits to individuals and their families. Although resource intensive, this method was preferred to a generic questionnaire mailing, as it was felt that a face to face input created better opportunities for the young adults themselves to be involved.
- A possible focus group was identified, with the awareness that this may reduce owing to potential difficulties of engagement/availability. In fact, some parents and young adults proved hard to contact, some were unsure about their involvement, and one participant withdrew consent after the interview. However, the aim of the project had been to provide insights on an individual level, rather than hard factual data so this did not reduce validity.

- Interview questions were scripted and responses later scribed. An initial hope had been that we could record the young adults themselves, however, consent for this could not be obtained. As a result, the learning platform outputs had to be re-shaped.
- Colleges were contacted regarding how they had constructed and developed the specific learning pathways of the individuals involved.

Outcomes and impacts

What we achieved

- As intended, the activity gave the school specific information about learner destinations on return to their local community, and highlighted areas where development could be undertaken and the school could seek to be influential. We were able to put together information to influence the thinking of current young people in the school.
- Also as intended, it will be possible to produce 'biopics' based on the information within the interviews. We are working with colleagues at Beaumont College to increase our 'digital' abilities and to introduce students to the use of digital media as a way of expressing their views and voices.

What we learned

- Transition reviews within the school have traditionally focussed mainly on finding and funding a college placement. Focus has also been around increasing social outlets outside the school, promoting independence skills both at home and at school and work experience. Whilst this was all valid, the learner voice has been underdeveloped, with the reviews focussed on statutory requirements, and largely adult led.
- Gaining access to the 'right' personnel proved problematic, making it difficult to do any specific tracking work with any of the colleges who received our learners. As a learning point, it may have been more successful if initial contact had been at Head teacher/Principal level.
- Opportunities for involvement in work for adults with learning difficulties once they leave college are very limited. Where these do occur, they may or may not be linked to their interests and abilities, and opportunities are not full time.

What we are taking forward

Local and national policy changes have a number of implications for the evolving local environment. For the school, these include:

- Adopting a more pro-active approach to promoting individual pathways which respond to individual need, allowing for a range of outcomes. This needs to happen early on in the young persons learning journey (key stage 3)
- Empowerment of learners and their parents needs to take place. Person-centred reviews will be introduced and the school has been asked by parents to create a forum which links them to other like-minded parents to look at developing shared, tailored opportunities. '*He needs to work, not sit in a day centre*' was the opinion of one parent. We aim to grow the voice of our young people so they too can be listened to.

How we are sharing it

- Within our school, 'Biopics' will go on the Learning Platform and also be available for use in assemblies/careers and work-related learning sessions.
- We will also be participating in ongoing collaborative planning conversations. This has been a direct consequence of the joint cluster project.

What advice we would give to others

- Plan in specific feedback and update sessions for your group- everything takes longer than initially expected, as people attend to other areas of work



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Background: Most leavers from Sandgate school have gone on to residential independent specialist colleges on leaving the school at 19. We talked to some ex-students who about their time at college. What were their hopes and aspirations before they went to college? How were these met, and what is life like now they have returned to their local community?

About Me

Name: Josh Marshall

Age: 22

Where I went: Derwen College in Oswestry

My future plans at school

I wanted to:

Be a footballer

Learn practical things like the temperature controls on the shower

Keep learning to cook food

Why did you choose Derwen college?

There were more courses available at Derwen than at Kendal College and it was away from home. I wanted to get better at my independent living skills and learn something useful (Hospitality and Housekeeping course and Creative Arts)

And what was it like?

I learnt to cook from the start in the restaurant and how to lay tables correctly and wait on. I worked in the bakery, small shop and the horticulture part of the college. If I was late for work in college they gave me a couple of chances then I missed out on a weekend activity to help me learn.

What would have made it even better?

More chances to cook from scratch myself, mainly I was only cooking microwave meals in my accommodation, as I wasn't allowed to cook unsupervised.

I would have liked to do more horse riding in my spare time.

Back in Kendal

I work two days a week for Rite2Work and one day a week for Horticulture. I've been living at home with my mum and dad again. All my personal allowance goes on the support I need at work, so I can't have support to help me get out and about at the weekend as well.

What next

Finally, I'm hoping to move into sheltered housing in a newly converted building in the middle of Kendal in August or September. I'd still like to work every day, and then have support for a social life at the weekends.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



About Me

Name: Daniel Crowe

Age: 21

Where I went: Beaumont College in Lancaster

My future plans at school:

I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, but I liked being outdoors on the farm, growing my tomatoes or grooming the animals ready for shows, and I was good at fishing too.

Why did you choose Beaumont College?

I didn't want to go away to college. I wanted to come home to the farm and my family every night, and my dog.

And what was it like?

I was interested in film making, being out with Calvert Trust, abseiling, walking, kayaking, sailing. I was in a Regatta and came 1st. I had a placement on a different farm.

What would have made it even better?

More Creative Arts, especially pottery, and Environmental Studies

Back home

I leave college this summer, and I hope to be able to work at Rite2Work and Sizergh Castle garden. I am involved with Kendal Steam Gathering where I take my renovated tractor, and I go to Grayrigg Show and Cartmel.

What next

I want to live at home with help for working life to keep me busy and happy.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

About Me

Name: Matthew Coates

Age: 22

Where I went: Kendal College in Kendal

My future plans at school:

I didn't want to go away. I wanted to keep working on basic skills that would help me after college.

Why did you choose Kendal College?

It was local. I didn't want to live away from my family at all. If I had gone away and had a problem it might have been too far away for them to help me

And what was it like?

I learnt first aid, health and safety at college and in the community. I went to BCTV near the Golf Course where I did some gardening

What would have made it even better?

I would have liked to do some music and maybe learn a musical instrument

Back home.

I work two days a week at Rite2Work in Kendal, where I help collect recycling. If it is good quality we sell in the shop, if it is no good we chop it up and take it away.

What next

I want to move into my own place in the future with my girlfriend and with support. I know I need more help with money issues, from day to day and for paying bills

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Sector coverage: Special schools, local FE colleges, independent specialist providers, work based providers, organisations supporting independent living.

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