



## 'More than just a sleep over'

Susan Gill, Sandside Lodge School



### Summary

The overarching aims of this project were to improve transition processes for pupils leaving Sandside Lodge School, and to do this we needed to be able to facilitate pupils experiencing different options for their future placement, including residential college. The school has traditionally made visits to social care day services provision and to local further education providers including those with residential accommodation, but had never enabled pupils to experience a residential Further Education (FE) provision as part of their familiarisation with post school placements. It was also hoped that increasing their first-hand experiences would ensure our pupils are better informed and as a result better able to make their voice heard when discussing their future. Many pupils have opportunity to participate in residential visits for such as outdoor activities whilst at school, but this was the first time we had focused on potential future provision.

### Introduction

#### About Sandside Lodge School

Sandside Lodge School is an all age special school for pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs for severe or profound learning disabilities. Many have additional needs – physical disabilities, sensory impairments, complex health needs and communication difficulties. Some 25% have a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) as well as their learning disabilities. Sandside Lodge is located in the Furness and South Lakes area of Cumbria, serving a diverse and dispersed population around the Furness area. Currently the school has 15 pupils who are post statutory school age. Our sixth form provision continues to develop our vision of 'Outstanding Preparation for Adult Life' and the curriculum is focussed on further development of basic skills, literacy and numeracy, learning in the local community and preparing for leaving school.

#### What we wanted to achieve

We wanted to establish supportive systems which enable pupil's individual transition pathways to be defined and for staff to be able to engage pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD) in these processes through effective communication strategies. To achieve these outcomes we wished to continue our established programme of visits to local provision and to explore the use of already available published materials to support Person – Centered Planning approaches. Crucially, we also wanted to provide identified pupils with a hands-on residential college experience - a 2 day/1 night residential experience at Beaumont College. Our ultimate aim is to empower our pupils to make choices which will have positive lifelong outcomes.

# Implementation

## Planning our approach

Having identified the key activity (the residential experience) and the pupils we wished to focus on, we had to very quickly plan with the tutors from Beaumont College the nature of the activity, as we were dependent on availability of the colleges' accommodation during the February half term 2013. Our sixth form teacher took the lead in the planning of the two days with Beaumont staff, and he was accompanied by support staff who work regularly with the pupils in school. We also needed night-time waking staff as we knew one pupil could wake and present a risk to herself and the group.

Although parental permission was essential, because this was fully funded no parental contributions were required, and the activity was presented as a routine part of the sixth form curriculum. We knew we needed to broaden some pupil's horizons and this approach ensured all who we had identified were able to participate in the residential activity.. As we wished to be able to use the information gained during the pupils' transition planning, none of the pupils were in their final year of school attendance.

Additionally, through this project two key staff were able to attend professional development on listening to children and young people with profound and multiple learning disabilities.

## What we did

Pupils were informed they were going to Beaumont College for two days, staying overnight and they would be completing a drama project whilst there.,.

The theme behind the experience was Shakespeare's Macbeth. The two tutors from Beaumont, Francis and Sally, used a range of skills props and effects to build our production over the two days. The pupils enjoyed the use of costume and the atmosphere that was developed through lighting and music in the purpose built drama studio. Film was used to record the experience. In the evening the pupils enjoyed a meal out at a restaurant in Lancaster and then had some time to socialise in the evening.

The six pupils reacted in different ways to the activities and the overnight experience.

Pupil A found the experience challenging. She wanted to join in during the first afternoon but found her anxiety rising. When she worked with other pupils she would become aggressive towards them. She found it hard to participate consistently in the session throughout the first day. She came out to the restaurant in the evening and coped well in initially. The restaurant was spacious and quiet. However if the attention of those around her was not focused on her she would begin attention seeking behaviour. Overnight she woke during the night and set off the emergency call alarm.

On the second day it was decided that A was too anxious to work with the group, other pupils in the group would not be able to focus on the drama if they were concerned that she would be aggressive towards them or staff and so she went for a walk on the sea front with two staff.

Pupil B coped extremely well with the experience. Throughout the drama he joined in with all the activities with little prompting, he spoke to microphone and had a large smile throughout the two days. He worked well with staff and peers. He loved playing the ghost. He enjoyed going out to the restaurant in the evening and spent two hours talking nonstop, telling stories with great expression. He slept well and was very relaxed throughout the whole residential experience. He worked extremely well with the Beaumont tutors and we saw him grow

throughout the two days in confidence and stature. We felt that B would benefit enormously from a residential experience post 19.

Pupil C had some initial anxiety on her way to Beaumont and was very quiet in the first session. After lunch she joined in fully with the activities and enjoyed working with the group. She enjoyed the meal out but it quickly became apparent that she was very tired. She slept well, waking once in the night because she was "too hot". On the second day we saw C grow enormously in confidence and become Macduff in our performance. She loved the sword fighting choreography. We certainly feel C benefitted enormously from the experience and would gain a lot from a residential opportunity post 19.

Pupil D had some anxiety on the way to Beaumont having rarely been away from home before. Once he started the initial session and understood what the drama was he became the star of the show, acting and directing others. D was able to act with expression and put forward excellent ideas. He enjoyed the meal out with the rest of the class. When he wasn't engaged in activity D did become a little homesick. D would benefit enormously from further experiences like these, and we saw him change and develop hugely across the 2 days. He does struggle with seeing past leaving home or doing activities away from home, which is a potential barrier to him making progress.

Pupil E had some initial anxiety and immediately wanted to know when we were going back to school. During the first day he needed some coaxing to take part and was at times very distracted by another pupil. He enjoyed the meal out and slept very well overnight and had no anxiety about being away from home. On the second day we saw E grow enormously, taking part with little prompting, dressing as the murderer and thoroughly enjoying the experience. He interacted well with peers and tutors at the college.

Pupil F really benefited from the experience. He displayed absolutely no anxiety throughout the two days. Initially he was a little reluctant to take part in the drama, but through the activities he gained in confidence. He enjoyed the meal out and socialising with peers and staff. He slept well overnight. On the second day we saw F really grow into the character of Macbeth, he did some excellent acting when being chased by the ghost of Banquo. He needed no prompting on the second day and it was fantastic to see the way he developed during our stay. F would certainly benefit, develop and cope with a residential experience post 19.

## Outcomes and impacts

### What we achieved

We achieved our aim of providing a residential FE college experience within the context of establishing supportive systems which enables pupil's individual transition pathways to be defined. We also partially achieved our aim for staff to be able to engage pupils with PMLD in these processes through effective communication strategies, although it is recognised that further work and training in this area would be of benefit.

Our pupils learn well from first hand experiences and one positive example is that pupil D, having told us he enjoyed the experience, on his return to school in February told us he did not want to leave home, Four months on however he has begun asking the sixth form teacher when he can go to Beaumont College as he would like to go to residential college.

Empowering our pupils to make decisions from an informed viewpoint about their future remains a challenge but if we have broadened the horizons of only one pupil the activity has achieved its aim.

## What we learned

What worked?

- Hands-on, real life learning experiences in a residential provision.
- The choice of the activity for the group.
- A time-limited focussed activity with an end product worked well, and our pupils gained more from this than they perhaps would a series of one-off taster activities over a two day period. The focus for the pupils became the production of Macbeth rather than the residential aspects.
- Staff knowledge about our pupils was significantly enhanced by the learning they acquired about pupils reactions to the experience.
- Presenting this as an integral part of our sixth form provision, with the aim of broadening horizon not making firm decisions.

What worked less well:

- Using college accommodation in their half term break meant our pupils did not experience the social aspects and busy atmosphere of a college in session.
- Isolated professional training courses for staff were useful but felt disjointed from the main focus of the project. We were not ready for staff to return from the training and immediately apply their learning in a person-centred planning approach.

A key learning point - this reaffirmed our emerging belief about the importance of learner voice and the provision of person-centred approaches to planning their transition. We have to find ways of facilitating and empowering all our pupils whatever their abilities and needs.

## What we are taking forward

We plan to build this into an annual activity as an integral part of our sixth form provision, and wish to increase the number of different providers we link with in the future to offer a range of experiences.

We are exploring suitable published materials to use and develop within our curriculum to prepare our pupils for a person-centred transition planning process, and have prioritised this in our school improvement planning.

## How we are sharing it

We are looking to work collaboratively with at least one other South Lakeland special school to develop person-centred planning for transition, as both are prioritising this within their School Improvement and Development Plan from September 2013.

We will share this report by providing a link from our school web-site.

## What advice we would give to others

- Hands-on works best.
- Provide all pupils with the opportunity to experience a residential FE college even if they and /or their families are not keen – it is about broadening experiences not making firm decisions.
- Ensure this becomes one part of a cohesive programme to provide pupils with the experiences the need to be able to make informed decisions about their own future life.
- Use a focussed task with an end product or tangible outcome rather than a series of 'taster activities' during the residential experience.
- Follow up staff training immediately by enabling them to put into practice the learning they gain through involvement in a person-centred approach.

## Further reading

More information about Scope and Beaumont College, whom we linked with for our residential experience, can be found on their websites

We have also made a film to showcase our experience and enable the learners to 'tell their own story'. This will be available via our school website.

For further information, please contact Susan Gill (Head Teacher)

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