

Compass Youth Project

Evaluation

Gerry Cairns
September 2007

The review

The review was commissioned by Callander Youth Project (CYP) and was carried out in the last week of August 2007. Review activities consisted of a programme of interviews with participants, parents, Compass and school staff, members of the community, partners and other stakeholders and also a review of project documentation.

I am grateful for the openness and full cooperation given to me which made my task a pleasure.

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The Compass Project in Context

Focus

The Compass Project is an intensive youth support service within the Callander Youth Project. Its purpose is to provide dedicated personal development and employability activities for young people in McLaren High School as part of a person-centred curriculum timetable. It focuses on young people whose actual or potential underachievement due to such barriers as dysfunctional backgrounds, social and emotional difficulties, behavioural or learning problems, low self-esteem, adverse peer pressure, low expectations etc. are exacerbated by geographical isolation and the extremes of poverty and affluence.

The project operates within a large rural catchment area of 400 square miles, the largest mainland catchment area in Scotland. It is designed to overcome the barriers faced by young people in the area who are disadvantaged by not having the same access as their peers in urban areas to employment, training, education, additional support for learning and employment and social and cultural activities. These young people suffer rural exclusion as a consequence, which often leads to, or is exacerbated by poor mental health. The town of Callander in which the Compass project is based has a history of male youth suicide.

Aims

The aims of Compass are:

- to connect young people at risk of rural exclusion with opportunities for training, employment, additional support and certification.
- to provide opportunities for confidence building, skill learning (including basic life skills) and social and cultural interaction to improve mental health

The project focuses on pupils of McLaren High School between the ages of 11 and 18 and young people who have left school up to the age of 25. The oldest participant is currently 19.

The outcomes the Project seeks all participants are:

- improved mental and physical well-being; improved attendance and performance at school; improved interaction with parents, peers and teachers; improved social and cultural understanding and; happier, secure and well balanced young people.

For those who are about to leave school, the Project seeks to:

- enable them to make a smooth transition into training, employment or further education.

- Those who have left school may receive support with literacy and numeracy, training and employment preparation and acquisition. Participants may seek this help on an ad hoc basis.

The aims of the Project are consistent with four of the five National Priorities for Education, achievement and attainment, inclusion and equality, values and citizenship and learning for life.

The Project supports the 16 to 18 years group in making this transition by helping them acquire sufficient knowledge of the employment and training opportunities available; by becoming competent in applying for employment and further education or training and; by becoming competent in maximising the limited public transport facilities in the area. Young people are referred to the Compass Project by student support teachers/year heads in McLaren High School. All participation in the Project is by agreement of the young person, his/her parents or guardians, Compass and McLaren High School.

Compass in its present form was established in August 2005. The target number of participants to be achieved over its two years of operation was 80. The Project began taking referrals in January 2006 and since that time there have been 44 young people referred. Twenty three were referred in the only full academic year in which it has operated, 2006 -07. The Project has worked with 9 young people participating in the Prince's Trust XL programme in partnership with school staff.

In addition the Project has worked with 260 primary seven pupils in transition to secondary school. Compass has worked with the children prior to their moving up, having seen the advantage in making contact with the children as early as possible. McLaren High School complements this work with an open day for their new pupils.

Organisation

The Compass Project is the rural element of Compass for Life, a partnership led by Stirling Council's Community Services. Other partners are Careers Scotland, the National Health Service, Jobcentre Plus, Barnardos and the Aberlour Childcare Trust.

Locally in Callander, the partners in the Compass Project are Callander Youth Project (CYP), McLaren High School and Stirling Council (Youth Services and Children's Services). The project operates through a service level agreement between the partners and is delivered through resources provided by Stirling Council and Callander Youth Project along with funding provided through the Scottish Executive's Determined to Succeed initiative and European Community Objective 3 Partnership funding.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in its report on the effectiveness of Stirling Council's education provision (HMIE 2007), judged the performance of the Compass for Life partnership to be excellent. HM Inspectors visited McLaren High School during the visit and wrote as follows;

The Compass for Life Partnership is a well established yet innovative approach to meeting the needs of 14 to 25 year olds who face particular challenges in making

successful transition to adult life. The partners provide a range of individual and group programmes that build confidence and self-esteem and had improved participants' readiness for work and further education. Specific programmes had provided a focused response to young people's needs in relation to health, literacy and numeracy, housing, substance abuse and employment skills for the care sector. Effective partnership work, based on shared values, had impacted positively on the working practices of partners at the point of delivery.

Programme

- Programmes are designed to suit the needs and interests of each participant. They are configured from the following;
- The Prince's Trust XL programme is offered as an S3/S4 curriculum option to up to 15 pupils and co-delivered by Compass and school staff;
- a range of outdoor education activities involving Outward Bound, The Prince's Trust and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award enable participation to develop skills, confidence and interpersonal skills and certification for their achievements;
- group work sessions for mixed and single sex groups support the participants in gaining confidence and interpersonal skills
- community work placements provide participants with experiences such as working with older people, tree planting and other environmental projects and community events such as decorating the town's Christmas tree.
- work placements provide young people with opportunities to experience the world of work in a supported environment and;
- literacy and numeracy support is provided for participants experiencing a need to improve their capabilities. Tuition may directly support the school curriculum or focus on extra-curricular interests of participants.

Evaluation

Project Impact

Impact on participants

The impact of the project on participants was very good. Forty four young people had been referred to the Project since it became operational. This was a positive achievement taking account of the length the Project has been operating. A target of 80 young people was optimistic for a project whose participants are referred. The additional total of 260 primary pupils involved in the P7/S1 transition programme was very positive, laying the groundwork for future involvement by appropriate young people in the future by introducing them to CYP and Compass staff.

Participants identified major changes in their behaviour, attitudes and life chances since becoming involved in Compass. Those interviewed identified transformational experiences which had had profound effects on them.

Fourteen participants of the 23 participants in 2006/07 have now left the project for the following destinations;

- four are employed;
- six have started college, two of whom are living away from home;
- one participant has signed with the army;
- one participant remains at school and;
- one left the project for personal reasons.

All the young people interviewed identified major gains in confidence as a key outcome of their participation. The two participants who have started college and who are living away from home are a particularly good example of this. Previously they had little confidence, did not go out or mix with other young people. There was clear evidence from past participants of their progressing to employment and training opportunities which were outwith their previously held expectations.

All participants spoke positively of the activities in which they had taken part and were proud of their achievements in gaining the Duke of Edinburgh Award and outdoor activity awards. They recognised the value of the range of experiences they had had, identifying important gains such as team membership skills and development of other interpersonal skills and attitudes including listening skills and tolerance. They accorded particular value to group discussions led by Compass staff which helped them articulate their feelings while taking account of the views of others. They had acquired new information and knowledge within the group and had developed their interpersonal skills.

All past participants recognised the value of the alternative curriculum as a whole. They valued the contribution of Compass in making their school experience rewarding and of its support to their achieving positive educational outcomes. Some participants made

positive reference to the support they were getting with literacy and numeracy and others valued the help they were getting with dyslexia.

Past participants recognised the positive outcomes from their involvement in the project for their relations at home with their families. They spoke of getting on better with their parents.

Feedback from participants included:

-I was bullied in school and then was suspended. Compass has helped me believe in myself and be more confident. I still get bullied, but I am able to cope with it much better now.

-I am now able to manage anger better and the project has helped to release tensions in me.

-I am now hoping to become a policewoman.

-I started with the project because I lacked confidence and never went out. The project has been great. My confidence has improved amazingly. I meet lots of friends. The group work helps me to say what I feel and not be afraid of doing it.

-I have signed with the army and see a real career on front of me.

-I really enjoyed the work experience, which has led me to a college course. I have met people in the project I would not have met before. I am more independent and patient with other people. I got help with maths and it helped me pass my exam. I am finding it easier to be involved in classes in school and to make points in discussion.

-My year head felt the project might help me speak up and be able to relate to other people better. I learned team work and how to listen to people. The canoeing has helped me become confident in open water. My teacher reckons I am better at contributing to class and to group activities.

Impact on parents

The impact on parents was very good. All of them were very clear of the positive outcomes participation in Compass had had for their children.

Parent 1.

My daughter had not been doing well in school. The year head had recommended that she join the project to help her mix more easily with other people. The teacher felt that if she improved her confidence it would help in school. The changes in her have been huge. She is really

confident, doing more things and getting on better with me and other people. She is now starting a career and I am right behind her.

Parent 2.

My daughter never went out before she joined the project. She spent all her time upstairs on the computer. Now she is never in. She has made lots of friends and is involved in activities in Callander Youth Project. She is starting college and will return to take part in CYP events. She took part in the Race for Life and did her Duke of Edinburgh's award. She has really gained in confidence, is more helpful, faces up to things and deals with people in a way she never did before.

Parent 3.

My son was very quiet and withdrawn. He has changed completely. He is outgoing and confident. He did not want to do the Prince's Trust in the project at first, but I encouraged him to try it. He really enjoyed it then and it has resulted in big changes in him. He also did other activities such as painting and decorating and tree planting. He is at college now. I cannot thank the project enough for the changes it has made in my son. I would recommend it to anybody.

Primary school pupils with whom the project was involved in its primary/secondary transition work had subsequently joined in the activities of the CYP in significant numbers and some continued to use the Project as a source of informal advice.

Impact on McLaren High School

Compass had gained the trust and confidence of school staff in the short time since its inception. The project staff were trusted and valued as colleagues who worked constructively with pupils who were having difficulty. There were pupils the school could not have retained within the normal curriculum and for whom special measures would have been required, had it had not been for the support given by Compass and the alternative curriculum. The school appreciated the gains young people had made through the informal and intensive youth work methodologies deployed by Compass staff. The project provided a different type of learning environment in which these pupils could develop.

The school valued the project highly as a key element of its alternative curriculum. Teachers were confident that Compass staff had supported pupils who were engaged in its Staged Intervention system well. They had helped these pupils to embrace positive behaviours and attitudes and to engage productively with their learning. Staff referred to particular examples of pupil development in interpersonal skills, literacy, numeracy and engagement with learning. Although evidence had not been systematised and was not comprehensive, there was evidence of pupils having achieved educational and personal outcomes which would not have been predicted from their performance prior to engaging with Compass.

Staff contributions to the XL Project and to the P7/S1 transition work were valued highly by the High School

Informal relationships between Compass staff and teachers were very good. School staff dropping in for coffee and general informal contact in the Compass base was an example of a two-way interaction rather than relations being focused on the school alone.

A report by Stirling Council's Children's Services showed a drop in referrals from the school since the inception of the Compass project.

Impact on the Community

The impact on the community was very good. Responses to a community survey undertaken by Callander Community Development Trust showed that Compass was valued by the community.

The project was highly regarded for its participation in community projects such as litter clearance and decorating the community Christmas tree. The young people and staff were valued for their helpfulness and availability.

The Chairperson of the Community Development Trust was confident of the transformational effect the project had had on three young people now attending college. Prior to their participation in the project he would not have predicted this outcome.

Individual members of the community also benefited from assistance from project participants. For example a local lady had been helped with her garden over a period of about two months –

The boys and girls came each week for about two months. They worked really hard and well. They were really polite and helpful. I had intended to open my garden to the public but had not been able to maintain it to a proper standard. With the help of the boys and girls I was able to open it after all.

Processes and Systems

Recording and reinforcing progress

Systematic recording and reinforcement of progress was underdeveloped.

There were periodic reviews of progress and good ongoing informal reinforcement. Participants provided feedback and the Richter Scale was also used. However feedback from participants concentrated on their affective relationship to their involvement and did not address their learning and personal development.

It is recognised that some of the participants have difficulties with communication and in articulating their feelings. Consequently implementing the recommendations below will require staff to engage with the young people to elicit their perceptions over time and the use of indirect and creative strategies in some cases.

The use of portfolios of participants work to reinforce progress and to record distance travelled had not been maximised.

Recommendations

Feedback should elicit details on what young people know, the knowledge of self and subjects they have gained since joining, what they can now do and how their attitudes had developed since the last review, or since engaging with the project. Feedback should be complemented by objective observations from staff which should be discussed with participants and integrated into reviews of progress. These should be signed off by staff and participants.

The Project should develop systems where evidence of progress comes from a number of sources for example, evidence of progress, for example in literacy, in project work, observation of behaviour, achievement in gaining certificates, feedback from the school, feedback from parents and participants, feedback from placements and from Outward Bound.

Portfolios should include work done progressively between set milestones. They should include reviews and targets and be a clear guide to participants of the progress they had made.

Group work

Group work sessions were effective in supporting participants in developing personal and interpersonal skills. Sessions focused on issues of importance to the young people and also introduced issues such as health, healthy eating, community consciousness etc. Newspapers were used effectively to enable participants develop a critical awareness of their content, exploring current events and gender issues, for example. While some of the sessions benefited from their spontaneity, others would benefit from more pre-session planning and structure. The project had not developed an organised store group work resources, including materials and session plans which had worked well.

Recommendation

Staff should pre-plan the content and structure of appropriate group work sessions, while retaining spontaneity where appropriate. They should build up a resource of materials and also plans of sessions which had worked well.

Feedback from parents

Feedback obtained from parents when participants were moving on from the project was not focused sufficiently.

Recommendation

This should be further developed by asking questions to elicit what the young people can now do, what they now know and how their behaviour and attitudes have changed since engagement with the project.

Interface with McLaren High School

The system for referring pupils to the project worked very well. The young people, compass staff and parents were consulted and their agreement was obtained before the pupils engaged with the project. All parties all parties were satisfied with the arrangements. Information was exchanged between school and project over the course of the pupils' engagement. However this was incomplete and not fully systematic. For example, literacy and numeracy support was given through the project to appropriate pupils. In some instances the support was directly related to the school curriculum. In others the young people focused on particular interests such as the numeracy associated with buying a car. There was no system in place for feeding back progress to appropriate school staff.

Recommendation

The school and Compass should establish systems to ensure that teachers were informed of participants' progress in literacy and numeracy on and off the curriculum. Likewise copies of periodic reviews of progress by the young people within the project as a whole should be shared with the school. Overall, the arrangements for exchanging information on pupils' progress, particularly when involved in the alternative curriculum should be made more effective.

Staffing and staff management

The level of staffing was very good. It was consistent with the intensive work involved in supporting young people facing difficult personal, social and educational problems. There were two dedicated Compass workers, managed by the CYP manager, who also contributed directly to working with Compass participants. CYP also employed an administrator for 8 hours per week whose primary function was to support Compass

The core staff had a very good mix of complementary qualifications and skills. This enabled the project to deliver a varied programme and flexible programme. The two Compass staff had the skills and background to offer intensive support to the participants. Their expertise enabled them to major in health, healthy eating and fitness and work placements, enterprise and art respectively. The core staff of CYP manager and the two project workers was complemented by professionally qualified outdoor activity instructors.

Staff co-operation and dedication to task were very good. Morale was high. The staff were confident they were making a difference and derived a high level of satisfaction from doing a meaningful job. They felt that they and their work were valued by the young people, the school, CYP management and by each other.

Supervision and support of the three core staff was relatively informal and underdeveloped. It lacked the simple structures which would maximise its potential to channel staff effort to maximum effect. It was not timetabled and supervision was not recorded and signed off by supervisor and supervisee. The agenda for supervision centred round issues raised during the meeting or which the participants brought to the meeting. A development plan or individual work plan was not used as the primary focus.

There were no arrangements for staff appraisal and development, although CYP had been developing a system. Staff did not work to individual work plans which detailed their key work targets, including personal development targets.

Recommendation

Callander Youth Project should put structured supervision and support arrangements in place and also arrangements for staff appraisal and development.

Accommodation

Accommodation within the McLaren Leisure Centre was attractive in appearance, but limiting. The group work room used as the main work area was attractively decorated and furnished. It was well suited as a venue for group work. In addition there were three computers to support literacy and numeracy, with internet access. These were used extensively. However the room was relatively small and could easily become crowded.

Staff accommodation was very cramped. A total of 6 staff used the small staff base. Up to 6 could be working there together. There were insufficient computers to allow all staff access simultaneously. The constricted space made it very difficult to store equipment and other resources.

Recommendation

Callander Youth Project should seek more extensive accommodation to support group work and to provide staff with the accommodation needed for effective working. Space should be found to support the establishment of a teaching/group work resource base.

Project Management

The Compass project was managed through the Trustees of Callander Youth Project to whose meetings the project manager reported. The Trustees did not use a project development plan to focus discussion and monitor progress at its meetings.

There was also a project management group which met each term was composed of project and school staff. The meetings were informal, were not minuted and signed off.

Recommendation

The project manager should report on progress made towards achieving project targets in addition to reporting on day to day or other issues. A project development plan should be used as the primary focus.

The project manager should seek agreement of the school to introduce a more structured approach to Project management committee meetings.

Governance

Participation in governance by members of the CYP overall and participants in Compass in particular had yet to be developed.

Recommendation

Callander Youth Project should develop meaningful arrangements for young people involved in its programmes to contribute to decision making. Such arrangements might or might not be representational. However, they should be firmly grounded in being meaningful and effective for participants.