

On the Edge

Taylor High Report



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Introduction

Funding was received from Scottish Government's Mental Health Directorate to place Youth Navigators in a school to focus on the mental health and wellbeing of their young people. The nature of the funding was short term, covering the period January to March 2024 which did place some limitations on what was feasible.

We elected to work in one school, Taylor High in North Lanarkshire, which had asked us for support for the school generally and specifically with a group of 7 young boys who were excluded from school for much of the school week. These young boys were at risk from poor mental wellbeing, exposure to harm including substance misuse, violence and risk taking behaviour. Attempts by the school to engage with this group of boys had so far been unsuccessful. We placed an existing member of our team in the school, he was supported by a supervisor and two part time staff who led a music related initiative.

The findings highlighted key challenges for the pupils involved but also the positive benefits for the boys of working with our Youth Navigator team which we feel could be successfully replicated in other schools.



Background

The young people involved in the programme had all experienced a very traumatic event as a group the previous summer

One of their number had been electrocuted on a railway while they were all present and they had provided first aid until help arrived. He was very seriously injured and is still receiving medical treatment for his injuries.

As a group they were involved in risk taking behaviour generally and regularly smoked cannabis. They were also involved in low level disorder within the school and were all regularly excluded from class for swearing at teachers.

The Deputy Head teacher was very supportive of them, unlike some of his colleagues, and very focussed on getting them the support they needed. To an extent they had been written off by the school because they seemed to be too challenging to manage.

Prior to starting our programme we spent a bit of time getting to know the group and also met their parents where possible.



Our team developed a programme called On the Edge which was originally developed and tested in youth club settings but because of the sporadic nature of our contact with them had never been completely embedded in that setting. Our work in Taylor High gave us the opportunity to spend more time co-creating and refining this programme with the young people. It became one of the key tools used to stimulate discussion in the group and one to one sessions with our Youth Navigator and one of the key outputs from the programme. The manual for the programme is appended to this report.

The programme aims to empower young people to make better decisions about some of the issues they face as young people. The approach is trauma informed and young people are not compelled to participate.

The programme is designed to run over 12 weeks which fitted well into the time we had available for this pilot. It also maps to the Health and Wellbeing outcomes of the Curriculum for Excellence

On the Edge Programme Topics

- **Introduction**
- **Consequences of violence/reality of prison**
- **What is a gang?**
- **Alcohol and Drugs**
- **Mental Health and Wellbeing**
- **Guest speaker with relevant lived experience**
- **The Ripple Effect**
- **Positive and Negative Relationships**
- **Social Media**
- **Exit Ramps**
- **Celebration event and evaluation**

Intended Learning Outcomes

On the Edge has defined learning outcomes allowing the success of the programme to be measured. We anticipate the emphasis placed on each of these would vary depending on the participating group of young people and it is a programme that can be tailored their needs. The programme makes use of other resources we have developed including our school film as well as the relevant lived experience of some of our staff

Community

- What does the ideal community look like
- Identifying community areas which need improvement

Violence

- Explain the consequences of violence
- Showcase the reality of prison life
- Define what a gang is. What are the positives and negatives
- The impacts of crime
- The ripple effects of violence and addiction

Alcohol and Drugs

- What role can alcohol and drugs play in everyday life?
- The Identification of Gateway Drugs
- What are the implications of addiction

Mental Health

- What is mental health?
- It's ok to ask for help when you have poor mental health.
- An awareness of wellbeing



Social Media

As part of the programme this group were asked to form a focus group for a National campaign which was jointly developed by the Scottish Violence Unit, No Knives Better Lives and Medics against Violence and funded by the Scottish Government campaign about the use of social media to share images of fights in schools.

Called Quit Fighting for Likes the campaign asked for opinions from groups of young people to inform the direction and content of the campaign.

Taking part in the focus group for Quit Fighting for Likes gave these young people some agency and helped them to feel valued as part of a national campaign.

They were able to express their opinions without fear of reproach and their comments showed their conflicting feelings about social media which are summed up well in the quote below

'I wish it went back to the old days when we were wee boys and it was banging with nae social media and you had to go and chap on each other's doors. 't was just so much better like you never cared about half the things cos when I had a phone (and no social media) it was you and your pals you never cared what anybody said and they were just going to say it to your face and it wasn't the end of the world where nowadays you can get a full army leaning on you . I think it was better when we never had phones.'



Nothing r
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FIGHTING
YES

Their Community

The community lessons from On the Edge were used as icebreakers for the programme and allowed the group to speak about their community and what they felt should be improved.

What came across very strongly in their discussion was that while they wanted things that would benefit them personally, such as a karting track and sports facilities, they also recognised the big issues for their community and were all very focused on what would make it better for everyone.

In the graphic below they have included a rehab facility, employment opportunities, a nursing home, green space and family support.



Music

Alongside On the Edge, our team spent some time exploring what interested this group of young people. A key interest that emerged was music. We were fortunate to have connections with a musician and a DJ and both were able to support the group through weekly lessons to develop their own lyrics and which they set to a backdrop of drill style music. The health and mental wellbeing impacts of music are well understood and these lessons allowed the group to express their feelings in different way and to create something at the same time. It was clear that these sessions, particularly the ones on lyric writing allowed them to vent a lot of their anger safely.

Building a track

- Role of the drums, bass, melody, vocals

Making money from recording and performing

Making beats

- How to make beats using drums using practical and knowledge based learning

Writing lyrics

- Understanding lyrics in different sorts of music
- Writing song titles

Sampling and using samples

- How to sample popular music tracks

Putting a track together

- This stage was largely completed by our musician as was quite technical but they boys had input into how it should develop and sound

Recording vocals

- Vocals were recorded by the boys, the musical team and the Youth Navigator



Music-Lyrics

The Taylor Legends

Verse 1

Brace yourself for this!

I was the undefeated champ, better than the rest.

So catch me if you can, I'll put you to the test.

I never got caught, I'm not that daft,

You're playing with Nerf guns; I'm learning my craft.

Pretty soon, you'll be getting my Autograph son.

Going to start this shit on a high note.

When I leave the room, I'm high though.

Verse 2

Nobodies above us, we say how we feel.

No judgment and no rats listening.

We take the ordinary to the unreal.

Why did I puff green?

Cause there was nothing else to do.

I was an absolute menace it was a crime scene.

Pigs at the scheme every other day

So, lets see who's coming out to play.

It's either crackheads or jakes,

With their Lidl bags full of stolen steaks

Or Yankee candles full of summer spice

Trying to punt them at twice the price.

They think we're trying to cause trouble.

We just want to make music, we'll never crumble.



Emerging Themes and Impact

Although the programme was time limited our debrief with the group towards the end of the programme demonstrated some very positive outcomes and impact from their involvement with Youth Navigator. We were also able to understand why previous efforts by the school to engage with the group had been unsuccessful.

Lack of trust

Lack of confidentiality

No common ground

Not relatable

Young people felt that everything they told counsellors that had been brought in went straight back to the teachers

Emerging Themes and Impact

We spent time with the group towards the end of the programme to understand the impact of our involvement

We were also able to take part in an in-service day with the teachers and at that were able to get across to the teachers that we felt these young people had potential that was unrealised and that lacking a sense of belonging to the school was impacting on their mental wellbeing and hence their participation in school activities. Since the programme has ended several of the young people are more engaged with school, are attending more often and one is seeking an apprenticeship.

Seeing other options

'They were good at talking you through situations and helping you to see another way of doing things'

Conversations in a safe space that had impact

'Best thing was having conversations, we've spoken about everything'

Relatable lived experience

'They understand us because they've been there too'

No judgement

'if something happens the first thing they do is ask you if you are OK, they don't judge'

Improved wellbeing and connection

*Calmer
Arguing less
Smoking less cannabis
Talking to each other more
Feeling part of a team*

A good experience

Will look back on it as a good experience



Conclusion

We started this programme by telling the group it would end. That helped to give them realistic expectations and to prepare for an ending without feeling let down

We ended the programme with a celebration and took the boys Go-Karting and for pizza.

Our emerging themes demonstrate the positive impact of the programme and of it being led by people who have walked in the same shoes as the young people making them relatable and authentic. We think this programme which explores a range of different risk taking behaviours has the potential to spark conversation, something often lacking among young men, about their feelings, fears, hopes and aspirations and to increase their sense of self-efficacy and wellbeing.

We are still in touch with the Deputy Head Teacher who has joined our steering group as we continue to deliver this programme in two further schools.

