



Evaluation for Investing in Children membership

Education Welfare – Central Office

Over the past few months I have met with staff from the central office discussing the way in which the team offer their service to children and young people and the ethos the team have and their approach. For the purpose of this evaluation my main contact has been Dawn Grant, Senior EWO. I also met Keith Tabiner, the Team Manager, Sue Middlehurst EWO and Dave Robbins EWO. However I was assured by Dawn that the team all works in the same and **this was endorsed by the young people that I met with at two sites.**

Evidence of dialogue and change is provided by young people from Durham Johnson and Durham Community Business College.

Durham Johnson – Sue Middlehurst
Drop-in – Tuesday am every week.

I met with three young people, all who had visited Sue that morning at the drop-in. Lauren told me that the school refer the young people to the service when their attendance drops below a certain level. Rebecca told me that **‘I didn’t know that my attendance had dropped that low, coming here keeps you up to date with your attendance,’** Jonathon agreed. All of the young people said that they do tend to come every week, Lauren told me how she hadn’t been sure if she was seeing Sue this morning so she just popped her head round the door to check her appointment on her way to lessons. I chatted to the young people about the system of coming down to the drop-in, Sue gives the young people a slip; they give this to the teacher at the beginning of the lesson. It is important to note that all three young people said that this system works and that teachers do not make a fuss. Mrs. Coady is the teacher responsible for attendance and works closely with Sue. It is clear that this joint approach means that the service can be quite discreet and ensures that young people use it and do not feel that there is any stigma attached. They all agreed they are not **‘shown up’** in lessons.

This is something that the whole central Education Welfare Service tries to promote. They build up the support systems in school, making relationships with key people who can make things happen in school for the young people.

Lauren also told me that Sue discusses with the young people the issue of confidentiality and will offer support to the young people in dealing with any problems they might have, or issues they feel prevent them from attending school. Rebecca and Jonathon also told me about this and do appreciate the support they can get. They told me that Sue would discuss issues with teachers.

All three young people said that it is good to watch your attendance go up. They also said that Sue checks the register for each week. More often than not the young people’s attendance is recorded incorrectly. Sue makes sure that the right attendance is recorded. This has quite an effect on the young people’s overall attendance figures. Mistakes are made because students might be with another teacher for whatever reason and if they are not there at the beginning of the session then they are recorded as absent.

Lauren, Rebecca and Jonathon think the service they have improves their attendance and does have an impact on their life in school. The young people were also aware of some of the systems that school has tried to improve attendance i.e. ringing home if the young person does not come to school in the morning, however the young people pointed out, **“my Mam works she is out before me and I am back in before her so what’s the point of that!”** The young people think that it’s been stopped anyway.

What has proved effective is the Drop-In service provided by the Education Welfare Service where young people are able to talk face to face with a worker who they feel is there to help and support them. This echoes the thoughts of the workers who said that the drop in provides young people with a space to have their voice heard in a relaxed environment. This has been a new development in Durham Johnson. Even Sue the EWO was honest enough to say she didn’t really want to change the way in which she worked, but now was please with the success of the drop in. The drop in at Durham Johnson has recently been evaluated to ascertain its effectiveness. The results have shown a marked improvement so this pilot has now been extended across the whole of the upper school.

Durham Community Business College – Dave Robbins
Office space provided by school.

Dave Robbins is based in DCBC. He has his own office which means that the young people who need to see Dave with reference to their attendance can do so at any point in time. Dave works very closely with staff from the school, especially Mr. O’Hara, the Attendance & Behaviour Co-ordinator and Miss. Hall, the SENCO.

This collective approach has had a dramatic impact on attendance. Durham Community Business College was the highest achieving school in improving attendance last year. After years of never achieving over 90% attendance last year saw the overall attendance go above 90%. The students were rewarded for this with a big disco run by Galaxy FM.

Dave is proactive in his approach to dealing with attendance and does a week of assemblies. I.e. Attendance Week In School, assemblies given to students in house groups. This provides the opportunity for Mr. Robbins to be seen in school and challenges students to think about their own attendance. Attendance is encouraged and rewarded and there is an Attendance Award Trophy given out each month. Dave has also run poster competitions in school (please see some examples attached.) He also joins in other activities in school such as career day. This has the positive effect of Dave being a recognised face in school.

I met with four young people at DCBC, Aaron Young, Sam Cummings, Gemma Crooks and Amanda Dixon. All of the young people I met knew Mr. Robbins and had had some involvement with him in school. Aaron and Sam were able to tell me about the assemblies that Mr. Robbins does in school.

Sam said **“ he talked to us about our education and what affects our education, he also told us about what he has to do if we are not attending school – he has the right to ring our parents, but he told us why. I think he is good at nearly everything; he is a very nice man. If you are in trouble he is not strict with you he is there for you.”** Aaron and Sam then went on to tell me about the charity work they do in school. **They run a coffee club where they offer teas and coffees to students and staff at break time. They have already raised over £100.00. Well done.**

On a more serious note there is a legal path that the Education Welfare Service must go down when a young persons non-attendance goes beyond what is required by law. However even within this DCBC through the work of Mr. Robbins has had some successes. I chatted with Gemma and Amanda who have both had more dealings with Mr. Robbins. Amanda did feel like he had talked through everything with her and her parents and although she has a lot going on in her personal life this support has enabled her to keep her attendance up in school. As we were sitting chatting in the EWO office Amanda saw a picture that she drew in year 7 up on the wall about attendance. Amanda is now in year 10. Gemma agreed that Mr. Robbins was ok but had problems with the system in general. Gemma is into working with horses, she enjoys every aspect of working in the stables, riding and caring for horses. Nothing is on offer at school to do with horses so she doesn't see the point in attending anyway! Gemma did acknowledge that Mr. Robbins has been out and that sometimes she does make the effort.

Conclusion

After much discussion and deliberation with the team and young people who use the service of the Central Education Welfare Office I would say that the ethos and approach of the team does seem to reflect how the team feel the service is offered. The students I met with were all able to talk positively about their interaction with the EWO officers and recognise the difference it made for them at school. Other young people that I met with for the evaluation of Durham Community Business College agreed with my report and all agreed that Mr. Robbins being in school does mean that he is available as part of a wider staff team and do not feel as threatened by him.

Therefore with this in mind and confirmation from the young people I would like to recommend that the Education Welfare – Central Team become Investing in Children member.

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