

## **John Craig Churchill Fellow 07 – Report**

### **Challenging behaviour – Training, support and alternative solutions.**

#### **Introduction:**

I have over the last thirty years of teaching gained a great deal of experience in varied educational settings across a range of ages and learning difficulties. In choosing to visit the USA and the state of Maine in particular I was looking for an opportunity to reflect on my experience and look at how other professionals address the needs of challenging students.

I currently work in Lincolnshire the fourth largest county in England, covering an area of 6,000 square kilometres with a population of 673,530. The main centres of population are Lincoln (86,000) and Boston (56,000), with the rest being widely dispersed and 26% living in village and or hamlet settings. The county has 377 schools. Of these over 93 have 100 pupils or less.

As a predominantly rural local authority it faces many challenges in meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties because of the spread of population. I chose to visit the State of Maine because of its rural nature and the challenges this brings in meeting low incidence needs.

In planning my visit I had great help from several people in the USA who responded enthusiastically to my requests for information and support. The Director of Special Education for the State of Maine, David Stockford and his personal assistant Gaylord Watson sent me several emails with contact details and suggestions for settings to visit. Others who provided help in the planning were Dr Jim Artesani, University of Maine; Ruth Fitzpatrick, Vice Principal of Searsport High School; Cliff McHatten Consultant for Exceptional Children, State of Maine Education Board.

#### **Itinerary:**

29/05/07: Fly from Manchester to Boston. Collect hire car and stay in Boston

30/05/07: Travel up to Augusta the state capital. Stay for two days meeting with Cliff McHatten to confirm school visits and visiting the State Museum that chronicles the history of Maine.

01/06/07: Travel up to Winterport to stay with Ruth and Mark Fitzpatrick.

02/06/07: Invited to a world premiere of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Kruger Brothers – a unique performance of a composition specifically to unite a symphony orchestra and the sound of a Blue Grass country music band.

04/06/07: Visit Searsport High School. Met with Principal Gregg Palmer, Director of Special Education Sharon Goueghen and behavioural and special ed. teachers.

05/06/07: Invited to be part of an inspection of Searsport High School by the Maine State Board looking at improvements in the school over the last two years.

06/06/07: Visit to Old Town Program the closest so far to an EBD school I have found. Met with Director Barbara Gunn toured school and shared experiences.

Afternoon visit to University of Maine, Orono, to meet with Professor Bill Davis and Dr Jim Artesani, both of whom lecture in SEN and are involved in the Institute for the study of students at risk based at the university.

07/06/07: Meet with Cliff McHatten to arrange visits for next week. Travel down to Manchester, New Hampshire.

08/06/07: Fly to Cleveland Ohio for the weekend to meet school friend I have not seen for over 25 years.

11/06/07: Visit and tour of St Anslems College, Manchester New Hampshire.

12/06/07: Morning visit with Cliff McHatten the Good Will School, Hinckley established over a 100 years ago, a large residential school of nearly 100 students covering nearly 2500 acres.

Afternoon visit the Central Maine Learning Centre a small residential special school for 27 students.

In the evening attended a class given by Dr Jim Artesani at the University of Maine for school staff working with ASD students.

13/06/07: Revisited the Good Will School Hinckley to meet with Director of Special Education Anna Perkins. Focus of meeting was on their Student Led Conference and Motivational Teaching System (MTS).

14/06/07: Arrange visit to Long Creek Correctional facility. Attend lecture with Dr Jim Artesani in the evening at University of Maine.

15/06/07: Visit to Kidspace at Ellsworth a residential community for 55 students with up to 15 day students. The organisation is a national non-profit making one with other larger sites in Pennsylvania and Georgia.

Weekend off in Winterport!

18/06/07: Crisis Prevention Institute Tutor Certification course day 1, held in Portland.

21/06/07: Day 4 Practicum and Test. Completed and passed.

22/06/07: Visit to Long Creek Correctional facility, Portland.

23/06/07: Boston to meet and greet my wife! Stay at Seabrook for the night before driving up to Bar Harbor. Visit Hampton Beach and saw the Sand Sculpture Competition and exhibition... amazing

24/06/07: Invited to attend thanks to Cliff McHatten the Maine Directors of Special Educational Needs Conference at Bar Harbor. Conference lasts for 4 days and includes representatives from outside of the state of Maine as it has a national reputation.

29/06/07: Travel back to Winterport for weekend with the Fitzpatrick's.

02/07/07: Off to Boston for last three days. Looking forward to July the 4<sup>th</sup> Celebrations!

05/07/07: Leave Boston and arrive in Manchester, England on the 6<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

## 'My visits and learns'



### **Searsport High School – Principal Gregg Palmer**

Ruth Fitzpatrick who I was staying with for part of my trip is the Dean of Students of the school which has undergone many changes in the last two years. I was able to meet with the Principal, Gregg Palmer and the Director of Special Education for this district Sharon Goughen who explained to me how support for students is arranged.

The school does much to work with those students with challenging behaviour or who are disaffected and 'at risk'. In 2006 the school embarked on a program called SUCCESS designed to help students who experienced failure to get back on track and learn how to succeed in a high school setting. The program has four strands. First students attend Waldo County Technical Center. Second, all students take at least one regular classroom academic class at the school to keep connected to the regular program. Thirdly, they are enrolled in a literacy intervention titled FAME. Fourth, all students take at least one virtual class on a computer system named 'Plato Learning'.

The underlying philosophy of project SUCCESS is that for some students the very idea of excelling in a high school is so foreign as to be an almost unrecognizable concept. Getting them comfortable with succeeding is half the battle. The project in the school puts students in low stress situations that carry a strong chance of positive reinforcement. The program's design then encourages them to build up to more challenging expectations, both socially and academically.

What I did find of great interest was how the aims and objectives were made so explicit by the staff and school. They made it clear that project SUCCESS

would offer an alternative learning environment in which students can learn at different rates of time, with different but successful strategies and tools, and with a caring and dedicated staff of visionary teachers and leaders.

Staff will focus on Professional development which will enable them to approach behaviour problems in a way that builds character and offers opportunities for restitution; use active listening skills and problem solving strategies; and use social skills that demonstrate positive character traits.



### **Old Town regional program – Bangor – Director Barbara Gunn**

The Old Town Regional Program (OTRP) is a public separate day school for students in Grades K to 12 from districts within Southern Penobscot County. The OTRP is dedicated to providing support to those students whose behavioural and emotional difficulties prevent them from being able to take advantage of their local educational programming. The OTRP is an option on the continuum of services which school districts seek for those students requiring more intensive educational support services.

Each student is provided with an individualized behavioural and academic program as well as mental health services. The OTRP seeks to assist students in the renewal of positive feelings towards school and learning. The aim is to develop patterns of appropriate behaviour in school that will lead to a return to community schools or programs.

The school has small class groups and students are offered help by a range of professional i.e. teachers, educational technicians (support staff), social

workers, consulting psychiatrist, speech therapist, occupational therapist and vocational instructors.

In meeting with the director and staff I was impressed how they managed a very wide range of age and abilities as there were at that time only 35 students between 6 and 17 years of age. They had a clear focus on assessing behaviours and addressing them specifically in order to return students to referring schools. Although some students may stay for more than one year it was the expectation that the student would work towards a return to the community program he or she had come from. They had the benefit of agencies on the premises working directly with the student and family if necessary.



### **University of Maine – Orono – Dr Jim Artesani**

I was very fortunate to be able to meet with Jim Artesani and a colleague of his Professor Bill Davis who both lecture at the university and are involved in the running of an Institute for the study of Students at Risk. They are both involved in running courses for serving staff in schools in the areas of special educational needs and support staff across the state by researching areas of risk such as Drop-out rates, crime, violence, drug and alcohol abuse statistics involving young people. A major piece of work done by Professor Bill Davis was on the analysis of the major issues around effective programs and dropout prevention strategies.

What I did find interesting was the fact that the time spent looking at special education by students at the university who are training to become teachers was very little. Those that are interested do return to evening courses to obtain additional qualifications. I was invited to attend two evening sessions

of a group who were looking at the education of students with Autism. I very much enjoyed the sessions and was very welcome by the group. In particular I learnt much from the input on Functional Behaviour Analysis, a very popular process in the state for assessment and also on Social Stories the way it is suggested that Autistic students may learn the skills necessary to cope in social settings.



### **Good Will Hinckley – Director of Education Troy Frost**

The Good Will Hinckley is a not-for-profit organisation that has been working with young people since 1889. The 2540 acre campus can work with up to 300 young people a year with residential services, educational and counselling services. The original principles of the school were established by George Walter Hinckley when he started to help disadvantaged and orphaned young people and they are still central to the work today: Religion, Home, Education, Discipline, Industry, Recreation.

On the campus they provide education in three settings a middle school, high school and special education centre. The school use a motivational teaching system that focuses on behaviour to support students. One aspect of the school that I particularly picked up on was the involvement of students in their evaluation of progress and areas for development through the Student Led Conference. The aim is for staff to help students demonstrate six guiding principles:

- A clear and effective communicator
- A self-directed and life-long learner
- A creative and practical problem solver
- A responsible and involved citizen
- A collaborative and quality worker
- An informed thinker

The purpose is to build relationships and improve the quality of conversations about educational topics among student, family, teachers, friends, counsellors and other workers. This is an area that I do feel needs to become more explicit in my own working environment as we aim to develop student life skills and competencies.



## Maine Central Learning Center –

The Central Maine Learning Center (CMLC) believes that all students can achieve high standards and have abilities and talents that are worthy of being identified and supported. CMLC is a specialized day treatment educational program that strives to insure that each student becomes an independent and confident learner. The instructional methodology is individualized and structured to capitalize on a student's strengths.

Program Goals are to:

- Provide a safe, nurturing and supportive environment that responds to the individual education needs of students and promotes character development.
- Support students while academically challenging them to achieve their highest potential.
- Develop and maintain a learning environment that promotes the success of all students.

Although a quite small school it has embraced a practical approach to the curriculum with students building their own workshops, animal enclosures, greenhouses and developing the grounds to provide recreational space.





## **Kids Peace National Centers – Gorham Lake Campus**

KidsPeace is a private charity dedicated to serving the behavioural and mental health needs of children, preadolescents and teens. Founded in 1882, KidsPeace provides a unique children's psychiatric hospital, a comprehensive range of specialized and intensive and therapeutic residential treatment programs, accredited educational services and a variety of community-based treatment programs and foster care and family services to give hope, help and healing to kids facing crisis.

KidsPeace offers services in Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia and the District of Columbia. The campus I visited in Maine was a residential centre with educational facilities for students with challenging behaviour and autistic spectrum disorders. My particular interest was in the amount of time the organization gave over to staff training, in particular to the management of conflict and counseling skills. Everyone has to go through a two week induction course in these skills which has been designed by the organization. A lot of time is spent on training to ensure that all staff manage consistently the students.

## **Crisis Prevention Institute training (CPI) – Portland**

I was able to join a training course organized by CPI in Portland, which was a provider that I had heard of while visiting the Old Town Regional Program. The four day Instructors course was very enlightening for me as I had the opportunity of studying with a wide range of professionals. Other course members worked in Adult Mental Health, High Schools, Care of the Elderly and residential settings similar to the 'Brat Camps' I had seen on British television.

I am a trainer in the UK for Team Teach and was interested in experiencing and seeing what I could learn from this program. I enjoyed the training very much and liked the way in which it allowed course members to participate in the learning and come to understand the relationship between the actions of



staff and client when managing conflict. At the end of the week I had completed my accreditation successfully and had a qualification that I could also use back in the UK as CPI is a worldwide organization.



**Long Creek Youth Development Center – Portland  
(Correctional  
facility)**



I was very lucky to gain access the Correctional Facility and have the opportunity of touring the educational facilities and have lunch with some staff and clients. The new buildings provide excellent resource areas for academic and practical subjects and the work I observed in the technology area was outstanding. The Staff have taken a Constructionist approach to the curriculum and work on the individuals strengths, supported by remedial classes if necessary in basic skills and have vocational learning pathways.

They work with clients between 3 months and two years generally, many of whom will have dropped out of High School. Because of the wide age and ability range the staff has a highly developed assessment and support program. The facility also works closely with agencies following release and supports accreditation, clients can graduate high school while there.



## **Education Conference in Bar Harbor**

Thanks to Cliff McHatten and Sharon Goughen I was invited to attend the annual conference held in Bar Harbor for the Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities (MADSEC). Although designed to bring together all the Directors of Special Education in the state of Maine it does have a national reputation and representatives were present from many other states.

The conference did have a wide ranging program and I was able to attend some of the lectures that were not specifically for administrators. What was interesting for me was the relationship between federal and state law governing education, especially for special educational needs. This was illustrated by a lecture from Julie Weatherly, an attorney specializing in special education when she discussed 'What's new?' in the Federal Law - Individual with Disabilities Education Act -2006 (IDEA) and how this impacted on local delivery of services and expectations of parents and students.

A very relevant and interesting presentation was given by Christopher Kaufman, a licensed psychologist on ADHD. It was entitled an Educators guide to Executive Functioning and Related Best Practices. I found this very informative as he made clear how issues for students with ADHD, such as impulse control, emotional control, frustration tolerance and adaptability will affect cognition and learning.

Another presentation by Tom Hehir, Director of School Leadership Program at Harvard University was relevant in looking at New Directions in Special Education. He put forward the idea that those involved in special education need to be able to use data to show outcomes for students as part of their accountability. He was able to show that there had been an increase in uptake of educational programs for those with a disability post high school except for the group with emotional disturbance.

The conference members from Maine and around the country were all very accommodating and the opportunity to talk, share and discuss practice, issues and establish common themes was a highlight of the trip. The setting was amazing and my wife, who had come out to join me for the last eight days,

and I were able to explore a very beautiful part of the Maine coast in between the presentations. Bar Harbor is a very popular holiday area and is next to Acadia National Park a spectacular setting. In between discussions with conference members we were able to sightsee and even go whale watching a truly awesome experience.

## **Conclusion**

The conference I returned to Winterport for a few days to look around the area and say thank you to the Fitzpatrick's who had been so helpful and hospitable during my trip. After so many visits and discussions with professionals I had much to reflect on. Ruth's favourite saying at the end of day when I had stayed with her was, 'Well, John. What have you learnt today?'

The answer was always quite a lot and it is only upon my return that I have really appreciated all my experiences and learning opportunities. My last four days were spent in Boston at a time of great excitement as the city prepared for the July the 4<sup>th</sup> celebrations. The Boston Pops Orchestra put on a concert that goes live across America and is accompanied by a spectacular fireworks display. I was very lucky to be present for this and at the end of the trip of a life time have such pleasant memories to keep.

In the middle of all of my visits I was also able to travel and spend a weekend with a school friend of mine that I had not seen for over twenty-five years, who now lives in Concord, Ohio. The opportunity to meet, catch up and meet his children was incredible. Boating on Lake Erie was also pretty cool and to be able to pick up a friendship as if we had never been apart was an emotional experience.

I must again take this opportunity of thanking all at the Churchill Memorial Trust for their support and of course family for allowing me to follow my dream. I would also like to acknowledge the support of my school governors in allowing me time away from school and the staff who stepped up and covered during my absence. My thanks also to colleagues and friends in Maine who opened up their homes and establishments for me so willingly sharing their practice and allowing me to observe. I have been privileged to make many, many friends and share experiences I will not forget!

*John Craig -'07*